We Killed a Dragon Last Night

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We Killed a Dragon Last Night

by inameitlater

Summary

Will remembers falling.

He wakes up months before Jack got him to work for him. Months before he met Hannibal for the first time.

Free from his past he decides to change events and meet Hannibal again.

Notes

End OTW Racism: A Call To Action: https://end-otw-racism.tumblr.com/

Note: Blanket permission for translations, podfic, fanfic in this timeline/universe, fanart, etc. Have fun, let me know if possible and link to the fic, please. Thank you! :)

I feel very stereotypical in writing that English isn't my first language and that this fic is the first work I have finished in many years.

I'm very grateful for my wonderful beta readers: shanebarry17, dan_dresdner, obermietze, TayoAnn, Aston Bentley, Gwilbers, emptyheart, viaorel and Cathy_Kitty_Pritty. Thank you so much for all your help! All remaining errors are mine.

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: We Killed a Dragon Last Night by spacemonkey42
- Translation into Русский available: Мы убили дракона прошлой ночью by Vi_Ehwaz
- Translation into 日本語 available: We Killed a Dragon Last Night by maw_mow_r
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- Translation into Português brasileiro available: Nós Matamos um Dragão Noite Passada (We Killed a Dragon Last Night) by withga

Chapter 1

Will woke up with the memory of falling and Hannibal's arms shielding him against the impact of hard, ice cold water. He screamed and sat up. It was dark around him, but it smelled familiar. Will was sitting on a bed, drenched in sweat.

Wolf Trap, Will realized with a start and stumbled out of bed. Something was wrong.

"Hannibal?!" he asked with a wavering voice.

Maybe Hannibal had brought them to Wolf Trap. But he wouldn't, would he? Wolf Trap was not safe. It was sold a long time ago. Jack would find them here, Will thought confused.

He walked a few steps and stopped with a cramping stomach. In the twilight, he saw dogs lying around the living room. His dogs? But they should be with Molly.

Will turned on a light and looked through the room. One of the dogs moved to look at him. It was Buster. As Will looked over his dogs he realized only Winston was missing. Buster stood up and came to Will. He bent over to touch the dog and frowned. Buster should have a scar from Randall Tier's attack, but Will couldn't find it.

"Hannibal?" Will asked again and his voice sounded terrified in his own ears.

He went to his knees, catching Buster roughly while he went down, holding himself up with one hand on the ground and one in the warm fur of his dog. He couldn't breathe and tremors ran through him. Buster whimpered and Will let go of him.

Panic attack, he thought and let himself drop to the side. He couldn't breathe, his heart was racing and his limbs became numb. He was shaking and shaking and in his mind he kept calling for Hannibal.

Will couldn't say how long he was lying on the floor, but it felt like an eternity. The dogs were surrounding and occasionally licking him.

At some point breathing became easier and the feeling in his arms and legs returned. He was still shaking, but the panic had subsided to a bearable level. He reached out and touched Buster. He felt and smelt real.

Will touched his stomach with his other hand. There was no scar under his wet t-shirt. He started to undress and to check all the other places on his body. The gunshot wound from Jack was as much gone as the scar from the gutting in Hannibal's kitchen. The scar from his knife wound as a policeman was still there, but not the wounds the dragon had given him. His cheek was whole and that was impossible. He remembered getting shot and gutted and knifed. And he remembered killing and feasting, and he remembered Hannibal and the fall.

Maybe he had died and this was the afterlife. Or maybe it was an illusion he was having during his moments of dying. If it was a vision, then it was the quietest and calmest he had ever had. He was in Wolf Trap before he met Hannibal and before the Minnesota Shrike, as Winston's absence showed him.

Will looked back to his bed. According to the clock it was nearly 5 am. He stood up and went to the kitchen. He got food for his dogs and let them out for a while. He stood in the door and watched them with silent amazement as they rushed through the snow. Then he made coffee and looked for his bag. It was at the entrance door and his cellphone and his laptop were in it, his very old and outdated cellphone and laptop. Both looked clunky and it took Will a moment to remember his PIN code for the cellphone. It told him the date. Will swallowed heavily.

It was seven and a half years before the fall from the cliffs and about nine months before Jack came into his classroom and pulled him into the madness. Nine months before he would meet Hannibal. And in two days it would be Christmas.

Remembering the password for the laptop was harder, but after a few failed attempts he entered the right one. When it started up he carried it to the bed and sat down. The sheets were still wet from earlier, but Will barely registered it.

His internet connection was as bad as he remembered. Molly's and his had been better. Walter would have rebelled otherwise. He searched for Hannibal Lecter first and there were some hits, but only in the society news and some publications. Will stared and stared when he found a picture from some soiree. Hannibal looked younger and very well fed.

There were a lot more hits when he typed Chesapeake Ripper into the search bar. The last cycle had ended one and a half years ago. Freddie Lounds had written some extensive articles about The Wounded Man and Miriam Lass's abduction.

He kept searching, first Molly and Walter and then everyone else. Molly was not widowed yet. Chilton had taken over BSHCI a while back. Mason Verger's father died half a year ago, and a photograph of Margot's marble face was featured in some society news. Alana had published an article about trauma.

Everything looked so real, felt so real, and it had been hours since he woke up. Will had had some pretty heavy hallucinations in his life, but none was so long and so… mundane. There was no nightmare stag, no wendigo, no dragon and no Garrett Jacob Hobbs, just his home and his dogs.

Will's stomach reminded him that he hadn't eaten since… well either for seven and a half years or at least a very long night. He laughed, a bit desperate. According to the clock it was lunch time. He checked his kitchen, which was surprisingly well stocked for this period of his life, but then Will remembered that it was nearly Christmas. He must have bought enough so he didn't have to go out during the holidays.

He made himself a sandwich. He was still hungry afterwards, so he put a frozen dinner in the oven while he showered and shaved. Freshly groomed he sat down to eat and tried to think

about his options and possibilities. He felt as if he could have a mental breakdown at any moment. He was either having the longest dream ever or his mind had time traveled seven and a half years into the past.

Or he was dying and still dreaming.

After he finished eating, Will washed his plate. He needed to collect more information and he needed to see Hannibal. He put out water and kibble for the dogs and took his car. It was a long drive to Baltimore and he had to stop two times to get coffee. His hands were shaking and he wasn't sure if it was from the coffee or from the lack of sleep or from what seemed to be his reality.

Will reached Baltimore in the late afternoon and stopped at a fast food joint. He got another coffee and used the restroom. Back in his car he stared at his hands. This was a bad idea. He had just pushed Hannibal off a cliff. He wasn't even entirely sure why he had done that. Had he wanted to die or had he just wanted to kill Hannibal?

Killing the dragon had felt incredible, Will thought as he drove the familiar route to Hannibal's house. The black blood in the moonlight wasn't even a day ago from his perspective. There was a chance that Hannibal would remember it, wasn't there? They had fallen together. If this was, as unbelievable as it sounded, time travel, then maybe Hannibal would remember it, too.

It was not night yet but the house was dark when he reached it. Will stared at it for a while then went through Hannibal's old schedule in his mind. It was a weekday and the holidays hadn't started yet. So, if he wasn't at home then he should be at his office.

Will restarted the car.

The possibility that he had dreamed the future years seemed unlikely, he realized as he drove. He had never heard of Hannibal before Jack introduced them. He hadn't even read his article about social exclusion or any of his other publications. So how could his mind create the Hannibal he had just seen online. He should probably start taking some notes about the future he remembered so he could be sure he wasn't fooling himself. If he wrote everything down, he could be sure he had really experienced something before it had happened.

He reached the office and the light was on, but the red and white curtains were drawn. Will parked in one of his usual slots and looked at the windows. A strong feeling of longing overcame him. He wanted to go in and sit down. He wanted to smell the books again and speak with Hannibal. He wanted Hannibal to make sense of what was happening. Of course, Hannibal's way of helping him see clearly usually involved lots of blood, dead people and knives, but right now Will didn't mind it and also… it had been beautiful to kill the dragon.

Will closed his eyes and pulled the memory up. Hannibal moving in the moonlight like lightning, and black blood pooling around Francis.

Will opened his eyes and looked at his hands. They weren't shaking anymore and he felt

calm. From the corner of his eye he saw movement. One of Hannibal's patients left Hannibal's office; it was a man who had died during the altercation with Tobias Budge.

Twenty long minutes later Hannibal appeared, wearing a suit and an open coat with a scarf over it. He strode calmly to the Bentley and drove off. He did not look like his world view had been turned upside down. Will exhaled the long breath he had held.

We killed a dragon last night.

He put his forehead against the steering wheel.

"Do you not remember me?" he asked, his own voice sounding rough.

Will drove back to Wolf Trap in a haze. When he arrived, he let the dogs out, filled their water bowls and tried to sleep. It didn't come easy. He tried to walk into the stream, an exercise that had calmed his mind in the past, but it didn't work. In the end, he pulled up the memory of killing the dragon.

He dreamt of falling, and of Hannibal's arms.

The old routine of looking after his dogs and maintaining the house took over the next morning. It was astonishing how quickly Will felt at home. It made him uncomfortable as he felt he was betraying his life with Molly and Walter, which was laughable because he had run off with a cannibalistic serial killer and that was definitely a bigger betrayal than moving into his old house. Will chuckled at his thoughts, and the sound of his own voice startled him.

He had been preparing fresh dog food for the last hour and his mind had been circling the issue of his displacement. He wished he could speak with… someone about it but he couldn't, could he? Will frowned and put the rest of the finished dog food into containers in the fridge. He walked into the living room and sat down on one of his chairs. For a moment, he stared at the other armchair in the room before standing up and moving it opposite his own.

Will sat down again and took a deep breath. This was probably more than a bit crazy, but he was either so mentally unstable that he had hallucinated a few years of his life, or his consciousness had time travelled to the past. So, making up someone to speak with his imagination wasn't that crazy by comparison.

Will closed his eyes and let the pendulum swing. He thought of the smell, a mix of spices and pricy toiletry. He made himself imagine the sounds of someone sitting down and legs crossing and when he opened his eyes Hannibal was sitting opposite him in the chair. His hair was short from the prison cut he had received, but he was dressed in dark pants and a dark turtleneck. Will looked at his middle and was relieved to see no bullet hole.

"Do you want to resume your therapy, Will?"

Will straightened involuntary and then realized that he was feeling intimidated by someone he had made up. The corner of Hannibal's lips curled.

"No," Will answered, "but I would like to have a conversation."

Hannibal leaned back and interlocked his fingers in his lap. "What would you like to talk about?"

Will felt himself smile and relaxed his shoulders.

"I find myself in an unusual situation," he said, "and I thought you might want to give me some input."

"After you pushed us over a cliff and killed us?" Hannibal asked nonchalantly.

"You don't seem upset about that … and -" Will hesitated and looked down. He licked his lips and looked back up.

"You let me pull us. You could have easily stopped me, but you let me pull us and then you…," he hesitated again, "you shielded me when we fell."

Hannibal's face didn't betray any emotion.

"And you are not the real Hannibal. There is no reason for you to be angry. Apart from me worrying that Hannibal would be angry. And he doesn't fucking remember me, or that I pushed us over a cliff," Will exclaimed, his voice getting louder at the end.

Hannibal frowned at his words. Probably because of the cursing.

"Sorry," Will said exhaling and watched as Hannibal's frown lessened.

"I know that you are discourteous when you are stressed," Hannibal offered and leaned back in his chair, "but you don't have reason to be stressed in my opinion."

Will huffed. "I don't? I'm either dying and hallucinating or I hallucinated the next seven and a half years, or I time traveled into the past. And I don't see how I can figure out which option is the right one."

"What difference would that make?"

"Excuse me?" Will frowned at Hannibal's calm question.

"If you are dying and this is a hallucination, then you can't change anything about it. If the future years you think you already experienced are a hallucination, you will figure it out soon enough, because no matter how highly developed your empathy is, events will divert. You couldn't predict global events. And if you time travelled, you would not be able to change anything about it either."

Will blinked and thought about the words. “Then at least I can prove or disprove the second option,“ he concluded and stood up to go to his desk.

There was a notepad with notes for his seminars on it. He ripped the used pages out and took a pen.

“Yes,“ said Hannibal behind him. “Of course if you disprove it, then you are in the midst of a major psychiatric crisis.”

Will turned around to protest, but Hannibal was gone.

“Guess I don’t need you right now," Will murmured, but couldn’t help feeling abandoned.

Slowly he walked to Hannibal’s chair and sank to his knees. He put the notepad on the seat of the chair, looked at the empty page and started to write. He worked through half the night, writing down facts of global events, crime news, technological developments and politics he remembered.

Afterwards he slept and his dogs woke him up way too early. He looked after them and went through his notes. They were pretty disorganized chronologically, but as he reread them he recalled more details. He spent the day typing the information into a spreadsheet with dates so he could catalogue it. It felt like putting together a timeline for a crime and Will found himself reminded of the times when he was investigating. With Hannibal’s words in the back of his mind about having a crisis, this exercise was grounding.

“Merry Christmas,“ Hannibal said when Will woke up the next morning. He was sitting beside Will, leaning against the wall. Will blinked sleepily up at him.

“I didn’t make you up,“ he said with a rough voice. Hannibal smiled a miniscule smile and Will couldn’t help but answer it.

“No, you didn’t ‘make me up’," Hannibal confirmed and leaned a bit closer down to Will, “but we both know that you don’t always have control over what you see, don’t we?”

Will raised his hand to reach for Hannibal’s face, but stopped himself and let his hand fall. His eyes didn’t leave Hannibal’s.

“Bedelia,“ he started and swallowed. “She suggested that you love me.”

“What do you think?” Hannibal asked instead of answering and it reminded Will that this was not the real Hannibal.

He looked away.

There was fresh snow outside and the dogs would love that. He could feel Hannibal watching him.

“It doesn’t matter," he decided and got out of bed. He grabbed a pair of pants lying over a chair and pulled them on. “No matter which of the options we discussed is happening, I won’t see my Hannibal again so what he felt is irrelevant.”

“Hmm…”

He heard Hannibal stand up as well. He didn’t hear steps, but he knew Hannibal had moved closer to him.

“That’s right, so maybe the question you should ask isn’t if I love you, but what you feel for me?”

Will turned and opened his mouth, but Hannibal was gone and he was alone, again.

He spent the day on his notebook, filling the timetable and stubbornly ignoring the question Hannibal had asked him and avoiding any chance to conjure him up. He started to add details of personal events, especially the ones involving Hannibal and the FBI.

The more he wrote down, the more he remembered and thought about it, the more he hoped he didn’t just hallucinate the coming years.

Because he would really like a shot at changing things.

He took a long walk with the dogs to clear his head. When he was back at home he went online and tried to check facts. There was some news he remembered when he read it, but he hadn’t included them in the list, so they didn’t count. He knew how much his imagination could fool him.

“Slow news day?" Hannibal asked behind him and peered over Will’s shoulder at the screen.

“Slow news week,“ answered Will cautiously. “And I realize now that I never really watched news. The next event I clearly recall is the shooting in Sacramento during New Year’s Eve.”

“You have to take the holidays off then?” Hannibal sounded pleased and Will looked up under his eyelashes. “Whatever shall you do with all that free time?”

“I assume you have a suggestion?”

“There are many charming concerts in Baltimore around Christmas. Most of them are for charity. I believe one is even organized for an animal rescue foundation.”

“The likes of which Hannibal attends,“ commented Will and looked away.

In a year from now Hannibal had told him how he usually spent the holidays. Will had found it charming that Hannibal had outed himself as a bit lonely. He had let him get closer.

“I don’t intend to meet Hannibal Lecter without proper preparation,“ he told Hannibal and closed his notebook.

“Pity.” Hannibal moved away from Will and sat down in the same chair Will had first imagined him.

“How would you prepare?”

Will fixed his gaze on him and thought about the question. “For one I would make sure that I don’t have encephalitis.”

Hannibal’s only reaction was a slight tilt to his head.

“And I wouldn’t be your patient. I won’t let you in my head again.”

“But that was so entertaining, my dear Will.”

Hannibal walked to the window and gazed outside. He crossed his hands behind his back.

“And would I even be interested in you if I don’t have the chance to get into your head?”

“My empathy will make me interesting enough for a start. And telling you that I don’t find you interesting also worked the first time.”

Hannibal turned and he smiled widely. “Yes, it did.”

Will felt his mouth move into an answering smile without his conscious thought. Warmth pooled in his gut and he closed his eyes. He wanted to see Hannibal again. It would be easy. A good hour to Baltimore and then wait at his house. But that way lay madness.

“I need to disprove the possibility that I’m going insane and imagined the coming years, first,“ he reminded himself.

“You are thinking too much about that possibility,“ Hannibal scolded.

“Well I had some pretty bad experiences with mental health care, Doctor Lecter!” Will nearly shouted.

He looked away and took a deep breath. He stared at his shaking hands. Hannibal stepped beside him and kneeled down, worry written on his face.

“You are afraid, Will?” His hands hovered over Will’s, close, but apart. “Don’t be. It all happened; we happened.”

Will had not seen Wendy, his Havanese, coming up to him. He had been too focused on Hannibal. So, he startled as she tried to jump up on his legs completely ignoring Hannibal. Hannibal took a step back.

“No jumping!“ Will said with no strength behind the command. He gripped her and pulled her up on his lap. She started to lick his face, excited about the rare treat of being on his lap and being cuddled.

“Spoil your dogs, Will,” Hannibal said and stepped further away. “Don’t work on the list. Tinker on some motors, go fishing and wait until you know. Don’t think about the options.”

Will looked in Hannibal’s direction and found security glass, like from Hannibal’s cell, running through his living room. It glimmered and then it was gone, together with Hannibal.

As hard as it was he tried to follow Hannibal’s advice. He tidied the house, took long walks with the dogs and spoiled them a bit. He had no current motor project, but his garage was cluttered and he made a start in cleaning it out.

When New Year’s came, he wasn’t exactly calm, but neither was he a mental wreck from worrying. As the news started to report about the shooting, he opened a beer and toasted to himself.

“Happy New Year," he murmured, amazed. “You are not completely crazy, Will Graham.”

When Will woke up the next morning, Buster and Wendy were on his bed. He groaned. He shouldn’t have allowed them up. Next, he would have the whole pack on it and it wasn’t big enough for that. He grappled Wendy who was looking very guilty and dropped her off the bed without scolding her. Standing up, he repeated the same with Buster.

He went through his morning routine of looking after dogs, showering and making breakfast.

He brought his notebook to the kitchen table while the coffee was brewing and looked over the timeline. He ignored the major events and looked at everything that involved people he knew directly. His mind went blank after a few minutes of going through the latest happenings.

“This … bread," started Hannibal, who had appeared in a black and red suit on the chair opposite Will without him noticing, “does not deserve the name bread.” He pointed at the toast Will had made.

“Sorry I’m not a chef like you.” Will frowned and bit into one piece of toast.

“No great knowledge of the culinary arts is necessary to buy high or even a good quality of food products.”

The sentence had been spoken a bit hopefully and made Will fume at first, but then he saw Hannibal’s amused look and huffed.

“If I start buying in your price class I will be broke within a month.”

Will had to remind himself, that this Hannibal was created by himself. This wasn't Hannibal making jabs, it was his own subconscious telling him something. He decided to ask directly.

"And food and… money are a problem, why?" He took another bite from the toast and shoveled some scrambled eggs in his mouth.

He watched Hannibal frown at his display and smirked.

Hannibal leaned back and straightened his suit jacket a bit. Will's smirk changed to a smile. It was a welcome sight, even knowing this wasn't the real Hannibal.

"I would of course always prefer to have you eat good food. One cannot be too careful with what one eats."

Will suppressed the urge to correct him to "whom one eats".

"Money on the other hand will be relevant if you wish to change certain events."

Will took a sip from his coffee and looked to his notebook. He hadn't decided what to do yet, but it seemed his inner Hannibal had.

"What do you think I want to change?"

"I think you should make sure that dear Molly's husband doesn't perish for one." Hannibal looked innocent when he said it. "Little Walter can grow up knowing his father."

"You are not very subtle."

"I'm not very real. This is what you imagine Hannibal would say. I might become subtler when you have finished your coffee."

Will laughed and drank some more.

"I will make sure Molly's husband lives."

Hannibal's slight fondness changed to slight triumph. Will wondered if he had gotten better at reading Hannibal's micro expressions or if he really needed more caffeine.

"And it won't take much money to change that. But for other things I will need money, and maybe false papers." Will paused and made eye-contact. "I will need your help, too."

"Are you trying to negotiate with a figment of your imagination, Will?"

"Well we both know that I don't always have control over figments of my imagination."

Hannibal leaned forward. "I always found that very attractive."

"I know."

They stared and it was Will who looked away first.

“You won’t like everything I want to change," he confessed. “I have to make my own design.”

“Will your design include me?" Hannibal asked softly.

Will took a moment before he answered. “Yes.”

“And what part of your design will I be?”

Will looked away and raised his shoulders lightly. “I’m not sure yet.”

Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Hannibal frown.

“The first time we met I was interesting to you because of my empathy, and the circumstances. If circumstances change, I might not be interesting enough.”

“You are afraid you might get eaten.”

No, Will thought, *I’m afraid I will not have this connection with you again.*

Being eaten would just end a miserable existence without Hannibal. But he couldn’t verbalize that. Not yet anyway.

“I found you interesting when Jack told me about your empathy. I found you prickly and invigorating in Jack’s office, and glorious in Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ kitchen.”

“Covered in blood, just having killed.”

Will felt shy looking back to Hannibal. He couldn’t make eye contact, a habit which he thought he had overcome. Instead, he concentrated on the rest of Hannibal’s face: cheekbones, lips, eyebrows, forehead. He wanted to touch and it was so disconcerting. He didn’t pick up where Hannibal had left off in their shared chronology of events, instead he took a leap.

“I sent a killer for you.”

“You showed me your first tentative steps as your real self.”

“I brought you meat.”

“Yes.”

“I betrayed you and you gutted me.”

“I felt gutted by your betrayal,” Hannibal confessed.

“You expected more.”

“Different, not more. In the end, I overestimated my ability to change you. I let you see me and expected you to follow me into the dark. But you weren’t ready. Are you ready now?”

“I killed a dragon with you.”

“And then you pushed us off a cliff. Did you expect us to die?” Hannibal sounded calm and seriously interested in the answer.

Will pushed his plate away. For a moment, he wanted to get up and tidy the kitchen, but he knew he just wanted to avoid the discussion.

“I’m not sure.” Will licked his lips. “Killing Francis was… beautiful. Sharing it with you was a revelation. I wanted more. I wanted you, but I was so afraid of drowning in you and losing myself. And I felt tired.”

He sighed and stood up, knowing he was doing it to avoid having to look at Hannibal.

“Are you still tired?”

“Am I still suicidal, you mean?” Will put his plate in the sink and turned on the water. The sound reminded him of the waves as they were falling. “I haven’t thought about it since I woke up here. I don’t feel as tired. I feel longing to see Hannibal and sadness because he wouldn’t be you.”

“And…”

“And…?”

“Powerful now that I’m reasonably sure this isn’t a mental breakdown. I know things. I can change things.” He heard Hannibal stand up and come closer.

“But you can’t be sure that changing events will bring you to a better place.”

“No.” Will shook his head. “I can’t.”

He turned, leaning against the sink, and faced Hannibal. “But in 3 weeks, on a Friday, Garrett Jacob Hobbs will abduct and kill his first victim and I won’t let him.”

Will had expected a rebuff or at least skepticism, but Hannibal seemed delighted. He stepped a little closer to Will and tilted his head.

“You will kill him.”

Will swallowed and nodded. “To save Abigail.”

“She will never be part of your life. She will never even know you, Will.”

“Or you.” Will felt a bit guilty for saying it. “It’s the price I have to pay so that she is safe.”

“From all her fathers,“ Hannibal mused with a smile. “Do you know how you will do it?”

“I don’t have a plan yet,“ Will confessed.

“You could ask for my help,” Hannibal said and stepped even closer. He put his hands on Will’s sides against the counter, caging him. Will leaned backwards and licked his lips.

“Yes?” He looked at Hannibal’s lips.

“I can’t kiss you, Will. You are just imagining me," Hannibal suddenly said and Will startled, looking away. His breath had sped up.

“I… I don’t…”

“Shhh…,“ Hannibal took his hands away and put some distance between them. “I would if I could. But I can help you with Garrett Jacob Hobbs. Do you want to hear my suggestions?”

Will’s eyes flickered up to Hannibal’s for a moment and he nodded.

“Your courses restart next week and it’s a 17-hour drive to Bloomington,” Hannibal started.

They spoke for a long time and even with the murderous subject, Will felt himself relaxing. It reminded him of their therapy sessions. Bouncing ideas back and forth and getting steered in the direction Hannibal wanted him to go. It was easier now to recognize the manipulations. Maybe because this Hannibal came from him; from his imagination. But Will preferred to believe that it was because he knew Hannibal now and because Hannibal didn’t mind Will seeing what he did.

Still, he was thankful the conversation had taken a more practical turn.

It was also a very good distraction from Will’s wish to kiss Hannibal.

With the timeline as it was, there wasn’t enough time for a thorough preparation. They had decided that Will wouldn’t miss any classes. He had been attending to his classes without calling in sick or being late for a long time now. A change in this would be too noticeable and memorable.

Driving was impossible with only Saturday and Sunday to work with, so he had to take a plane. It would leave a trail, but hopefully nobody would ever look for it.

“You need a plausible reason to explain the flight,“ Hannibal said.

“What would your excuse be if you went?”

“I wouldn’t need one. I would travel under a different name.”

“Well I won’t get any false documents within two weeks. Maybe I can get some tickets for museums or stuff?”

“That’s an abysmal idea, Will. People know how good your memory is. If you haven’t visited the museums, you can’t provide a correct description when asked.” Hannibal’s words were said to cut, but Will had to hide a smile.

Will wondered how he would feel. He had long come to terms with the fact that it had felt good to kill Hobbs. He didn’t regret it. But he wondered if it would be different now that Hobbs was not a killer yet.

He thought about this to avoid thinking about all the other killers that were coming. He had this idea to take all of them out before they came up on the radar of the FBI, but knew it would not be practical to do this.

“You aren’t focused,“ Hannibal reprimanded from behind.

Will was sitting on his table with the intention of looking over his very outdated presentations ahead of his upcoming lessons. His lessons, though, were very far from his mind.

Hannibal had stepped closer and looked over his shoulder.

“He is no dragon,“ he concluded after a quick look at a picture of a dead body.

“Serial rapist,“ Will said and sighed. “Got caught because he got a rare virus from one of the victims.”

Hannibal gave a little huff. Will assumed he found it boring and unprofessional.

“Maybe you should prepare a presentation about the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“You are not on the lesson plan.”

“Yet.”

Will rolled his eyes. “My imagination must not be as good as everyone believes. Your manipulations are very obvious.”

“They always were," Hannibal confessed lightly. “You were just very distracted when we met.”

Will sighed and focused on the screen again. He clicked through the pages and made some notes about possible changes.

“Will I be on the lesson plan in the future, Will?”

He turned to watch Hannibal.

“Do you want to be?”

When his first day of classes came Will left an hour earlier than he usually did. He had to stop at an off road to freak out for half an hour. At home in his house, surrounded by his dogs, it was easy to accept the situation. But out there on the road, on the way to a class he hadn’t held for many years, the situation was overwhelming and caused him to have a panic attack.

While his hands were cramping around the steering wheel and his body shaking, Will wished Hannibal would show up. But this time his hallucination was not reliable and Will felt so desperately lonely that he started crying. When he had calmed down he looked at the clock and only 20 minutes had gone by. It felt longer. His face was blotchy and his eyes were red. He felt drained, but also calmer.

“Nothing I can do to change the situation," he told himself as he restarted the car.

He arrived at Quantico with half an hour to spare. Which was good, as he couldn’t remember which classroom he was supposed to go to. He bumped into another lecturer, who chewed his ear off with extended holiday cheer, but at least helped him out with finding his room.

There were no students there when he set up his laptop and tested the presentation. He kept standing with his back to the entrance and looking at the first slide while the students filed in. He realised he didn’t remember any of them with any detail when it was time to start.

The first few minutes were hard. He felt like he would stumble any moment, but it didn’t happen and that made him more nervous by the second. He was too fast and finished with time to spare so he pushed the students into a short discussion about the method of the rapist. In the past that was his now, he would have found it hellish. But now it was merely an inconvenience. The students weren’t very creative and listening to them was like watching a snail race.

He wondered if Hannibal felt like this. Ready to pick up the snails and throw them over the finish line because he couldn’t bare the slowness anymore. For his second and last lesson of the day he paced himself better and avoided communication.

Afterwards, Will packed his equipment and two big stacks of homework into his bag and left his lecture hall. He paused at a crossing that could either lead him to the parking space and his car, or to the labs. As a lecturer he had no justification to go to the BAU. Only Jack knew him from the opening of the museum and showing up there uninvited might cause suspicion in the long run. But he wanted to go and see them. Beverly might be there and…

“Will?”

Will turned in the direction of the speaker and Alana Bloom stood beside him. He exhaled in

amazement. She looked so young and soft. She was wearing a brown dress with miniscule flowers printed on it under a coat, and her hair was falling in big curls over her shoulders. She smiled openly.

“Are you alright?” She seemed worried.

“Yes,“ he blurted and pulled his bag closer to himself. “Happy New Year, Alana.”

She seemed a bit mystified by that, but answered: “Happy New Year. You seemed a bit lost in thought? Anything the matter?”

Will smiled. After years of knowing the hard and calculating Alana it was a pleasure to have her this caring.

“I just remembered,“ he started and paused, “or better didn’t remember if I left my dogs enough water. The toilet might be in for a renovation if I didn’t.”

Alana laughed and they started walking in the direction of the parking lot.

“How many dogs do you have?” she asked.

The question irritated him but then he remembered that she had never visited him.

“Too many," he confessed. It was a spontaneous answer but it rang true. An idea began to form in Will’s mind so he amended: “I collect strays and try to find new homes for them. The first part is easy, the second not so much.”

“You collect more than you give away?" Alana asked amused.

“Yes,“ Will signed and smiled too. “So should you ever want a mutt…”

Alana laughed a genuine and open laugh. Will’s smile widened. They had reached the parking lot and he was both relieved and disappointed that their talk was nearly over.

“I will think about it,“ Alana said. Will remembered Applesauce and nodded. Giving Alana one of his dogs might be a good thing. After all, he had some plans and caring for the whole pack and following his plans might be a bit much.

“If you want to have a look at them, let me know," he said and recognized mild bewilderment on her face. Ah yes, he hadn’t been that forward in the past. “You live a bit closer to Baltimore than me, don’t you?”

She nodded, watching him closely. He looked down and avoided eye contact as he said: “You can drop by or we can meet at a park and you can get to know them. Even if you don’t want one, you might know someone who would be a good owner.”

He put his bag down, pulled out his wallet and gave her one of his cards with his phone number on it.

“Let me know.”

“I will," Alana promised.

They looked at each other until Will smiled shyly and looked away.

“I better go, the water…”

She laughed again. “Better hurry. It was nice to see you.”

“You too, Alana, Have a good day.”

From his car Will saw that she was still watching him and he started his engine quickly. He waved after he had pulled out and felt a little thrill. He had surprised her. He had been open, so socially not awkward.

“Are you looking for a romantic relationship, Will?“ Hannibal asked from the passenger seat and Will nearly steered the car off the road.

“Hannibal,” he bristled and exhaled.

“You are much better at presenting yourself normally now. You are confident. She might not be deterred by you being unstable this time.” Hannibal paused and Will looked over for a moment. Hannibal was staring at him with an unreadable expression.

Will felt an urge to argue and reminded himself that this Hannibal was of his own making. He gave Hannibal another quick look. His mind had dressed him in a brown suit this time with a dark blue turtleneck underneath. Unfortunately, his mind was really good at making things up. Will made himself watch the road.

“I could be,“ he confirmed. “We would work out. There would be arguments, of course. I wouldn’t want to move into town and she wouldn’t want to commute to my place all the time.”

A quick sideway look showed Will that Hannibal didn’t like that idea. Nothing was obvious on his face, but he was sitting very straight and had made his face very unmoving. Will smiled. He had started it.

“And she would introduce me to her former mentor and friend Dr. Lecter.”

Will allowed himself a moment to envision this. Meeting Hannibal on a more even level. He gripped the steering wheel tighter and then willingly relaxed as much of his body as he could.

“And Alana would pale in your presence," he confessed and purposely didn’t look to Hannibal. He knew Hannibal’s longing gaze. He had felt and seen it many times.

“The circumstances of our first meeting would be different. How would you try to get my attention?” Hannibal asked.

Will smiled unevenly. “I could let it slip that I’m working on a presentation about the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“That would get my attention.” Hannibal said.

“But wouldn’t it be rude to poach me when I was attached to Alana?“ Will pushed a bit. Out of the corner of his eye he watched as Hannibal straightened his suit jacket. Will smiled. “It would not stop you. You would find a way, wouldn’t you? It might involve killing Alana if she got in the way.” Will paused as he had a thought. “Or get me to kill her.”

Will took a sharp breath as his mind created a possible Ripper tableau for Alana. Broken apart and put together, but that was all wrong. This kind of art would need to be left for the future Alana who was so brittle that breaking her was interesting. Alana in the now wasn’t brittle. She was soft and caring and warm. He wanted to wrap her in honey and gold. Paint her skin with gold until she was enclosed in it; protected so that she would never be in danger of breaking.

Will found himself saying these things out loud and noticed how Hannibal’s breath sped up. Will wanted to study his face, but the road demanded his attention.

“You would want to watch,“ Will guessed.

“Yes, very much so.”

They spent the rest of the drive in silence and when Will arrived at his house Hannibal was gone.

The classes on the next three days were tedious, but Will got more confident each time. Any differences in his teaching style might easily be attributed to the holiday break. People made New Year’s resolutions and tried to change. It wasn’t unusual.

He met Alana again, but between classes this time. They were both rushing to their lecture halls and only exchanged a few words. He repeated his offer to show her the dogs. Will liked the idea of giving her a dog more and more. He had told a few other lecturers and administrative staff that he was looking for people who would like to adopt a stray. Mainly because Alana would probably be less suspicious if she heard about it, but he could also imagine giving one to Beverly and maybe one to Jimmy too. None for Zeller though, or Jack.

He had avoided the lab after his first impulse to go there. He told himself it wouldn’t make a good impression. If he was suspected for murder again, and that was likely, he didn’t want anyone to remember that he had shown up at the lab one day and started to help with crime scenes. He brought up the topic with Hannibal on Friday evening as he was making dog food and saw Hannibal take a step closer to his work table.

“Are you thinking about helping Jack again?" he asked Will. It sounded neutral, but Will knew him better than to miss his disapproval.

“It’s a good position to be in. If we… get involved. And don’t tell me you didn’t enjoy entertaining Jack at your dinner table knowing you were feeding him the victims he was trying to avenge.”

“I did,“ Hannibal said and tilted his head, “immensely. However, Will, I remember distinctly that you did not enjoy yourself.”

Will put more pressure on the meat mincer than necessary as he answered with a rising voice.

“I had this illness called encephalitis. My doctor conveniently ignored it and my brain was swollen and inflamed. That might have something to do with me not having a good time.”

He turned to Hannibal, but didn’t make eye contact. Instead he concentrated on his cheekbones again. Hannibal had very interesting cheekbones. Will felt some of his anger drain away.

“My old self will be very confused about your feelings for him, Will.”

He laughed at this change of topic. “Because I can’t decide if I want to kiss or strangle him?”

“Without knowing our shared history, your contradicting feelings would be cause for alarm. I would suggest you be more consistent to avoid raising suspicion.”

“And ending up on the menu.”

Hannibal bowed his head in affirmation.

“I will try," Will promised and they didn’t talk anymore about it that evening.

Instead Hannibal watched him as he read through his students’ homework, and drank bourbon. It was very mind numbing work, but he got a kick out of reading really bad parts to Hannibal and figuring out how much Hannibal despised the author on a scale from slightly frowning to openly flinching.

“Most of them are a disgrace to the education they are receiving,“ Hannibal said indignantly.

“Be happy a lot of them are morons. Or you would have been caught sooner.”

“I didn’t get caught. I decided to surrender for a tactical advantage in our game.”

“Our game," Will shook his head at this description and laid his pen to the side. “Sacrifice a queen to get the king.” He grimaced as he thought about that picture. “I’m not the king.”

“No, you are more a knight, making jumps no other can make.” Hannibal gazed at Will who

ignored the look and concentrated on the students' works instead.

When it was time to kill Garrett Jacob Hobbs, Will drove to the academy with his luggage in the trunk and felt nervous when he entered the classroom. He was planning to leave for a weekend trip of murder later on and was lecturing to future law enforcement professionals. His anxiety made him too quick again and he ended up with a twenty-minute discussion about scarring as modus operandi. This time he handled it better as he manipulated them into arguing with each other instead of asking him questions. But the discussion made him uncomfortable anyway. He kept touching his stomach where the smile scar wasn't and then his forehead. He kind of missed his scars, he realized as the class ended.

He was still thinking about them when he boarded the plane. His body was younger and less scarred. He knew it was his own body, but sometimes he felt a little bit like a stranger in his skin. There was no ache in his shoulder and no uncomfortable stretching from his stomach. Will wondered how he would have felt had he survived the fall. Another wound for his shoulder and more facial scarring. Had the knife cut his tongue? He wasn't sure. He hadn't felt a lot of pain with all the adrenaline rushing through him. Hannibal would have stitched him up, he thought, and he spent the flight imagining the aftercare he might have received if he hadn't pushed them over the cliff. He fell asleep with the image of tiny fine stitches on his cheek and dreamt of travelling to Europe on his boat.

He woke up shortly before the landing and collected his bag and his rental. He made a short stop at a toilet in the airport and disabled his cellphone. It was late and he was hungry. He had booked a hotel close to some landmarks. He went into the museum with the longest opening hours with a 3-day museum pass that allowed entrance in a couple of the museums in the city.

Will was exhausted when he finally checked into his hotel. His mind was reeling with the details he had tried to absorb in the museum. He slept, and this time there were neither soothing waves nor the routines of sailing, but the exhibits of the museum hanging from the antlers in Garrett Jacob Hobbs' cabin.

Waking up was hard. He left the 'do not disturb' sign at the door, disabled the car's GPS and stole two sets of plates from two parking lots on his way out of the city. Outside he stopped at a petrol station and shaved off his stubble in the public restroom. He used some slick to smooth his hair and styled it in a similar way to Hannibal's. He put on the clothes he had bought for this purpose only: cheap jeans, runners, a white shirt and three jumpers over each other because he didn't want to wear his jacket and hadn't wanted to buy one just to destroy it afterwards. He looked weird and he felt uncomfortable in his own skin.

Back in the car he stored his stuff in the trunk and kept driving. He hadn't found a way to switch the car out without risk so he had decided to keep it. He wondered if Hannibal was ever as nervous when he was hunting. The thought made Will snort. No, Hannibal wouldn't be. What had he said when he took over the police car? Will should relax with himself.

"It's 9:13 am. My name is Will Graham. I'm on my way to Bloomington to kill Garrett Jacob Hobbs."

He inhaled deeply and let out the breath as slowly as he was able to. “I don’t feel guilty, but I’m worried I’ll get caught.”

“You can only take whatever measures possible to avoid getting caught, Will.”

Will looked to the side. Hannibal was sitting on the passenger seat. He was wearing his white prison suit. Curious, that his mind was making that one up.

Hannibal smiled at him. “I’m looking forward to watching you.”

To his own horror Will felt himself blush. He looked back on the road and kept driving.

Later Will had to switch the radio station to a classical one to stop Hannibal’s irritated looks at the speakers. The real Hannibal would have most likely told him about the composers or the artist, but his knowledge of classical music wasn’t as extensive as the real Hannibal. This Hannibal didn’t comment. They stayed mostly silent until Bloomington.

Will was relieved that he remembered the way to the house. He parked the car at a supermarket nearby and walked the rest of the way. He took the path through the woods and melting snow that Nicholas Boyle had taken and stood between the leafless trees, watching the house. He saw some movement, but nothing conclusive. After an hour he circled back and walked onto the street to pass the house as a pedestrian. There was only one car in the driveway and it looked like it was Mrs. Hobbs’ car.

“Where are you?" Will murmured as he walked to the next crossing. He had been very close to Hobbs for a long time, but now Hannibal had taken all available space in his head and the dragon was curled up around him, looking for an opening.

It wasn’t hunting season for deer. With Christmas only a few weeks ago Hobbs must be desperate. Conversations about college during Christmas hadn’t been good for him. He had already bought the train tickets for next week. He was already thinking about it, feeling guilty and scared because he didn’t want to lose his daughter. Maybe he went to the cabin to get away from the temptation, or he stayed because every minute was precious. Either way was a possibility. Will kept walking.

He thought about breaking into the house during the night, but the risk of having Abigail or her mother get in the way was too high for him.

Will took a short break in his car to warm up before he went back to the house. While he waited, he let the dragon curl closer around him and shared his patience as he watched his prey.

Garrett Jacob Hobbs arrived at his house shortly before dinnertime. Will waited and imagined the family dinner. He imagined Abigail happy and free from the darkness her father had brought over her.

An hour later Will was freezing and decided that he was a bad hunter. Maybe he should have come last week. He would have doubled his chances and he would have had more time to stalk Hobbs. Something he was obviously bad at.

He had to go to the car to warm up and to move it from the now probably empty parking lot. The walk back dragged on his reserves. He was fucking cold. Back in the car he started the motor and turned the heating up to full power. He waited a few minutes until glorious heated air flew around him.

Will drove off, not sure where to. He thought about driving back to the city to take a shower and warm up, but he couldn't. It was nearly midnight and in about twenty hours he had to be at the airport. If he missed this chance, things would get complicated and Abigail would be involved. He wanted to keep her out of it.

Will drove out of Bloomington and found a McDonald's drive-thru. He got a coffee and ate some burgers in the car, which he had parked as far from the cameras as possible, and tried to think about killing Garrett Jacob Hobbs. His mind went back to Abigail all the time. He could nearly hear her voice talking about being the lure. Will stopped eating and looked out in the night.

"I'm not a hunter," Will said, barely audible. "I'm a fisherman."

He might get lucky when he stalked Hobbs, but he didn't have to. He knew exactly the kind of lure he could use on him. Will smiled.

Sunday breakfast, Will thought in the morning when he called the Hobbs' house from his burn phone. He knew how the kitchen looked and could picture the menu. The symmetry of his plan was alluring. His Hannibal would have loved it.

The phone rang and Will couldn't breathe for a moment as Abigail answered the call. He swallowed. He had to follow the plan.

"May I speak with Mr. Garrett Hobbs, please?" he said, involuntarily putting Hannibal's intonations in his voice.

She didn't answer him, but he could hear her as from afar.

"Dad, it's for you."

"Yes?" Hobbs said as he took over the phone and Will suddenly felt calmer.

"You don't know me Mr. Hobbs, but I know you." With his eyes closed Will could see Hobbs. He was standing in his kitchen, phone in his hand, bewildered and a tiny bit worried because there was something that he didn't want anyone to know. "She is everything, but she is leaving and you can't stand the thought of losing her." Will could hear how Hobbs took a breath, shocked and wanting to react to what Will had said. He had to stop him. "Don't ask

how I know or who I am. If you say something like that she, or your wife, will know something is wrong. You don't want that, do you?"

This time he waited, but got no reaction.

"Say no, Garrett," he suggested.

"N…no," Hobbs said and inhaled loudly.

"Good. I know you want to… consume her. So that she can never ever leave you. So that she becomes a part of you."

Silence answered him. Will realized that the background noises had quieted down. Hobbs must have left the kitchen. Very good. One of the risks Will had seen had been another murder scene in the kitchen.

Will waited.

"Who are you?" Hobbs finally broke the silence. His voice sounded rough and Will couldn't help but to feel what Hobbs felt. The pain caused by the truth about himself, desperation about being found out and the risk of losing Abigail.

"I will give you an address. You will go there now and then we will talk," Will said without answering the question. "I will give you the address now. Are you listening?"

Garrett Jacob Hobbs left his house about 15 minutes after Will had ended the call to him. Will followed him at a distance. He hadn't seen a bag or anything in which a gun would fit, but he might have one of his rifles in the car and there were always knives. So, Will was careful. It took Hobbs only a few minutes after they exited Bloomington to realize he was being followed.

Stalked, Will thought and smiled thinly.

But he stayed on route. Will wasn't sure if that was a good sign. When they reached their destination Will parked a bit away from Hobbs' car and left his car first. He didn't walk to the entrance of the cemetery, but leaned against his car, waiting.

They talked for nearly two hours. Afterwards Hobbs typed a long message on his phone and saved it under drafts. Will checked it afterwards and nodded, it would do. Hobbs didn't want to sit in the car, didn't want to spoil it. They left the car and climbed the wall of the abandoned graveyard. They found a bench and Hobbs sat down. He took out the knife and put it in his lap.

"I'm ready."

Will stepped behind him. Hobbs raised the knife to his throat.

“It’s going to be very hard to do this to yourself," Will had warned half an hour ago, but Hobbs wanted it that way.

“You will help?" Hobbs asked. “Should I… should I need you?”

“Yes.”

Will gripped Hobbs’ hand when he faltered midway. Together, but mostly with Will's power, they cut through the other half of his windpipe and the artery beside it. Then he let go of Hobbs’ hand and the knife fell to his side. Will had planned to stay behind Hobbs as he bled out, but he couldn’t resist watching. He had to keep his distance to avoid getting blood on himself. It looked painful.

As painful as Abigail’s death, Will thought and it pleased him. There was a lot of blood and it looked beautiful in the snow. He should have made a pool in the snow to catch it in one place.

Maybe next time, Will thought. Hobbs reached for him in desperation and Will smiled and stepped away.

“She will hurt, but your message will help. She will do fine. She is strong. You made her strong. She will honor what you taught her.”

As Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ life ended, Will thought that he would love to feed Abigail her father’s flesh so that she could honor him as he would have wanted. The thought made him smile.

Afterwards, Will couldn’t make himself leave. He wouldn’t be called to interpret this crime scene and he felt like he hadn’t seen enough of it. He didn’t want to let it go. He had always felt the killer’s need to take trophies when profiling them, but now he understood it on a much deeper level.

“Wanting to take trophies, wanting to put a showy twist to the scene. Oh, you changed me so much,“ Will murmured.

After a while the forensic expert in him took over, made himself step away, climb over the wall again and back into his car. He drove off, away from Bloomington and towards Minneapolis and his hotel. He drove for 40 minutes and stopped at a rest stop. He changed into his own clothes and sealed the other in plastic bags. He looked in the mirror, but he didn’t look much different, apart from the missing beard. Nothing about his face showed that he planned and executed a murder that day.

It took him twice as long on the way back. He took detours and stopped at fast food joints and petrol stations to get rid of all the clothes that had no blood on them. Back at his hotel he had time to take a brief shower, then thoroughly cut up the sleeves of his outer jumper which had some blood on them. He left the remains in a series of trash cans on his way to the

airport. When he gave back his rental he complained about the broken GPS. It all felt too easy and he hoped that he wasn't overlooking something as tired as he was after being awake for over 36 hours.

On the plane, Will fell asleep during the safety presentation and only woke up when they were preparing to land. He felt more relaxed after the nap, and sitting in his own car was familiar and soothing. It smelt of his dogs and he smiled at the thought of their joy when he got back. The drive through the night was still hard on him, he had been awake for too long.

His house was waiting for him and for the first time it felt like his home. His dogs went crazy and he couldn't make himself tell them off. After he had calmed them down he went to bed, trying to get as much sleep as he could before he had to drive to Quantico. He was asleep within seconds and his alarm went off after what felt like a minute of sleep later.

Hannibal watched Will from the direction of the kitchen when Will turned on the light and stumbled drowsily out of bed. He was wearing black slacks and a beige woolen jumper.

"You didn't come," Will stated sleepily, while the dogs swarmed around his feet.

"I didn't want to distract you."

Will nodded.

"Will you tell me about it?" Hannibal sounded eager.

"Coffee and the dogs first?" Will asked. "And I need to call the sitter to let her know that I'm back."

"May I suggest you also eat something?" Hannibal made a face probably imagining what Will would eat for a quick breakfast. "You can eat and tell me all about killing Mr. Hobbs. I would prepare something for you, but…" He made a droll little gesture at himself to remind Will that he was not real. Will felt hurt. For a moment he'd had this idea of domesticity until Hannibal pulled him back. Maybe it was a good sign that his imaginary… psychiatrist made sure Will knew he was imaginary.

Brooding over that Will followed the advice. He started the coffee maker, then filled the bowls with dog food while his pack ran excitedly around his legs. He called the dog-sitter while they ate and let the dogs run for a bit. He was acutely aware of Hannibal watching him from the side. He was not pushing and Will was grateful to have time to focus.

When he came back inside the dogs had settled down and he filled a bowl with cereal. He sat down with coffee and cereal and smiled as Hannibal sat opposite him at the kitchen table.

"Tell me about killing Garrett Jacob Hobbs."

Will was exhausted during the next day of classes and his tiredness persisted for the whole week. Hannibal seemed to be contained to Wolf Trap for the time being, playing domestic for Will and whispering possibilities and plans into his ear. Will kept an eye on the press to see how Hobbs' death was perceived. It appeared like the press had ruled it was suicide and there were no articles or news about Abigail or her mother. He hoped they were alright. On Friday evening Will arrived to a Hannibal dressed in one of his extravagant suits. *Armored*, Will thought. He was proven right when Hannibal sat down in his armchair and stared at Will with focus.

"I think you should plan your next steps," he advised Will. "Which means, you think so too."

Will sighed, but agreed with a nod. He sat straighter.

"Killing Hobbs had the very predictable outcome I wanted. To avoid his killings and Abigail's involvement. To save her from him," Will said.

Hannibal waited without reaction.

"Now," Will licked his lips. Hannibal's eyes followed the movement. "Now I'm a bit fuzzy on what other outcomes I want."

Hannibal seemed to think about that. After a moment he crossed his legs. "I would suggest you imagine the best possible outcome you could wish for. Look at all the aspects you desire and then decide on the next steps to achieve them."

"Hm…," Will closed his eyes and saw them dancing in moonlight with the dragon. He felt his pulse speed up. They would eat the dragon in the house at the cliffs. He would be a special feast.

Will frowned and looked to Hannibal.

"Have you seen what you needed?"

Will didn't answer right away. Hannibal didn't seem to mind. What he had seen was specific and vague at the same time.

"I'm not sure," he answered. "It wasn't very detailed."

"Does it have to be, Will? Most people have very simple ideas of how their future should look."

Will laughed curtly. "It's not a simple idea."

Hannibal nodded in acceptance and asked: "But is it desirable?"

Will fixed his gaze on Hannibal. "Very."

Hannibal smiled, satisfied. "Then tell me, what has to be done to reach the moment you saw?

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

After the fall Will woke up 9 months in the past. 9 months before he met Hannibal for the first time.
Will is assuming that he is time traveling and starts making changes to meet Hannibal on his own terms.
As a first step Will manipulated Garret Jacob Hobbs into committing suicide and is now pondering what kind of relationship he wants with Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

English isn't my first language and this fic is the first work I have finished in many years. I'm very grateful how positive the first chapter was received.

Thanks so much for every hit, kudos and comment, it means a lot!

And a big thank you to LadybrokenTeacup and Aurelyn for pointing out errors in the first chapter! :)
Again, I'm very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17, dan_dresdner and obermietze. Thank you so much for all your help!

All remaining errors are mine.

Will carried the image of Hannibal's and his dance with the dragon in the moonlight with him for the next days.

He had spoken with his imaginary Hannibal about it. About his need to recreate that moment and the beauty Will had seen. Unsurprisingly Hannibal had offered his full support to get Will close to this time's Hannibal.

They had not discussed any concrete plans, but Hannibal was a frequent companion during Will's days. He wasn't there all the time, but he sometimes accompanied Will to Quantico or listened to the lectures with a small cold smile on his lips as he watched the trainees. Or he would show up when Will placed a bet with his knowledge of the future, standing a good bit away from the sleazier visitors of the betting places. It made Will smile.

Will liked it, as he had liked the domesticity of his wish for the future. Hannibal's companionship was soothing and let him forget how weird the situation was. He was —

probably— time traveling and instead of just staying away from all the craziness, he was planning to jump right in. Just to be with Hannibal again.

Alana stood beside his car when he emerged from the Quantico building on Friday.

“Hi,” she said with a smile.

Will smiled back, surprised, and avoided looking at her eyes. *Shy, fearful Will*, he reminded himself.

“Alana. How are you?”

“Good," she stepped to the side so he could open his door. “I thought about your offer to have a look at your dogs. Would you have time this weekend?”

Will blinked, surprised. The Alana of Will’s personal past had purposely avoided being alone with him for years and he was curious what had made this Alana change her behavior. Their last talk hadn’t seemed like much.

“I’m free. Saturday maybe? Do you…“ he hesitated. “do you want to meet somewhere or at my place?”

“I thought we could meet in the middle. Maybe at the Potomac?” she suggested.

Will frowned. “That’s more my middle than yours.”

Alana smiled warmly.

“You have a lot of dogs in your car. I don’t, so your middle sounds fair.”

Will couldn’t help but smile too. This was the Alana who took in his dogs when he was incarcerated, without complaints, and he felt forgiveness for the future things she hadn’t done yet rise in him.

“Okay, elevenish good with you?”

“Sure," she said and pulled her handbag closer to herself. “I have your number and will send you a text. See you on Saturday.”

“See you,“ he said and watched her walk off before he sat down in his car.

Will wasn’t surprised to see Hannibal sit in the passenger seat when he sat down in his car.

“Here to remind me that I’m spoken for?“ he asked Hannibal as the other man didn’t greet him.

Hannibal only stared at him in reply, and Will sighed.

“As I’m making you up, that’s most likely why you are here.” As if he could forget even without the hallucination. Half of his mind was always occupied with Hannibal.

He started the car and began his way up north to Wolf Trap. Will didn’t usually mind the silence, but he was a bit annoyed to get this treatment from his own hallucination. Especially a hallucination of Hannibal who usually always had something to say. It made Will angry to have him sitting disapprovingly beside him. He changed the radio from the news station to a country channel and suffered through some inane “Ask for your favorite song” show where the callers had to explain why it was their favorite, and told a lot of sentimental drivel. When he had nearly reached Wolf Trap, he realized he was torturing himself and not the real Hannibal and turned the radio off.

He saw his turn for Wolf Trap approaching, then sped past ignoring the exit.

“Let’s visit you,“ he said. The tension in his body seemed to vaporize after speaking.

“It’s an opera evening," Hannibal said softly. Will relaxed a bit more. Hannibal was right. He had created a news feed for Baltimore’s high society during the last week and tonight’s opera had been mentioned this morning. “You could wait at the opera instead of the house.”

“Less suspicious.” Will nodded.

“You will be underdressed," Hannibal said.

“No mingling with the crowd," Will decided. “Just a glimpse.” He laughed. “I sound like an addict. Driving over an hour to get a quick fix.”

“Will a glimpse be a fix, Will?” Hannibal asked, the interest in his voice evident.

“No," Will said without hesitation and with a rough voice. “It will be drops of water in the middle of a desert.”

“You could ask Alana for advice when you meet her tomorrow.”

“Advice?“ Will frowned at the change of topic. *On how to seduce you?* he thought confused. Alana hadn’t ever seduced Hannibal. She had walked into a trap and stayed there as bait for Will.

“You are looking for a psychiatrist. Maybe she could offer advice?” Hannibal suggested and Will laughed out loud.

“No," he rejected the idea without any hesitation. “You won’t be my psychiatrist this time, Hannibal.”

He threw a quick look over to his passenger and met his eyes. Hannibal looked relaxed and Will sighed. He had been baited.

“What will I be, Will?”

“Depends,” Will answered curtly.

“On what?”

“How much I can change you.”

He turned the radio back on to a classic station to stop the conversation, not ready to discuss the options of what Hannibal could be for him; to him.

They reached Baltimore and Will made a short break to get coffee. The opera was in a central location in the city and the traffic was dreadful. Will shouldn’t be surprised as it was a Friday evening. After some consideration, he parked his car and fiddled with his phone until he had figured out how to get to the opera with public transport. Hannibal stayed with him as he hopped on a bus and then switched to the subway. Will wore a constant smile as he watched his hallucination look at the other passengers. Hannibal wore a mask of polite suffering and Will was very sure this was Hannibal’s idea of purgatory.

He reached his target without incident and stalked the entrance from the other side of the street. The hallucinated Hannibal was gone at this point, but Will didn’t worry about him. He had gotten what he wanted. Will was here.

He pretended to play with his phone every few minutes. It was due to start in an hour and people were already arriving. There was a photographer taking pictures. Will assumed he worked for the local news. Will made sure to stay out of his lenses and watched the crowd, sometimes with his eyes and sometimes through the camera of his phone.

And then after an eternity of waiting for Hannibal, the real Hannibal, he stepped out of a taxi. He had no companion but seemed content at arriving on his own. He wore a sleek coat and a scarf over a smoking suit. Will stared shamelessly at him. He was still holding his phone in his hand, which was fortunate because Hannibal suddenly stopped on his way inside and turned around to scan his surroundings. Will lowered his head, fixing his gaze on the phone as he pretended to type. When he dared to raise his head again, Hannibal was gone. Will touched his stomach. His insides felt cramped. It reminded him of his time in the hospital after being gutted.

His mind was in uproar as he traveled back to his car. He missed Hannibal. More than when Hannibal had been in BSHCI. Hannibal had wanted him to always know where he was. In retrospect, Will realized, the knowledge that Hannibal was safe and available at any time had enabled him to start his life with Molly and Walter.
Hannibal had wanted Will so much he had given away his freedom. Knowing this, and knowing he was safe from his own darkness without Hannibal fueling it, had given Will enough confidence to let Molly in when he met her.

Remembering Molly startled Will. He hadn't thought about her for weeks, and now he remembered he had done nothing to ensure that her husband would survive. He felt some guilt rise up about his negligence and promised silently to look into it as soon as possible.

The guilt helped him not to obsess about Hannibal for the whole drive back. Instead he went through his options of helping Molly's husband stay alive. The man had died in a car accident due to faulty wiring on his way to work. Hannibal would probably suggest that making him lose his job was a safe way to avoid the accident, but Will would prefer to let Molly and her family also have financial security. Getting him to change jobs or the house or the car was more up his alley.

Changing his job would be difficult. Will didn't know anyone in engineering to swing that. Changing the house was possible as he could damage or destroy it. It would be traumatic, and even if Walter and Molly didn't remember the dragon invading their home in the original timeline, Will didn't want to bring trauma and tragedy to them for a second time. The car had to go and destroying a car wasn't too complicated. He just needed to drive up to their house and do some destructive work. Compared to his other plans for the future, this was an easy one.

The next day, he crowded his dogs into the car. After he had secured the dogs, he drove to the Potomac and parked close to the meeting place he had suggested to Alana. The dogs were overly excited as he let them out and it took him a minute or two to calm them down.

Alana arrived in her car, and he watched her park. She looked amused as she walked over to him and considered the dogs with some astonishment.

"A few dogs?" she asked, and Will smiled.

His old self would have been self-conscious, but having too many dogs wasn't his biggest fault, and now he knew this. *Hmm…*, that might be the difference Alana felt that made her react differently to him. He was more self-confident.

"As I said, it's easier to rescue and train them than to give them away."

Alana had reached them and crouched down to let the dogs sniff her hands. The pack happily came closer and greeted her. She was beautiful surrounded by dogs, glowing from the pleasure only an adoring animal could cause.

She prompted him gently to talk about his dogs, and Will let himself be pulled into an easy conversation about his pack.

"You really want to give them away?" Alana asked after a while.

Will swallowed.

"It's not easy giving them away, but…" *I might need to be ready to leave the country at short notice in the future.* "I recently understood that I can't cling to them as a crutch."

Alana didn't react to that, and he didn't look at her, but he could feel her gaze.

"I kind of expected some therapeutic advice?" he joked to interrupt the silence.

"Do you want one?"

"No," Will barked a short laugh. He had gotten more therapy than he ever wanted in his last life. He didn't plan on any therapy for this time. "It's just my prejudice against psychiatrists. I always expect you lot to have opinions about me."

He winked at her and she smiled.

"My opinion is that having a lot of dogs isn't the worst issue someone can have."

Will smiled sheepishly as she repeated what he had just thought.

"If you want to find them good homes I will help you with it," she continued without waiting for an answer from him.

Before they separated in the parking lot, Alana took a picture of every single one of his dogs and took notes about their names, their mix of breeds, personalities and issues. She promised to speak with some people and also promised to meet him for another walk in the next few weeks. It felt weirdly normal. A friend helping a friend. He couldn't actually remember ever having such a normal talk with Alana. Most conversations he could remember had been about murder.

Will was fine when he drove home, but upon arriving at his house the realization of why he was doing this in the first place set in. He was making plans to give his dogs away and what kind of fuckup was he to plan to give them away for a relationship with a man who killed and ate people? A man who had lied to him and manipulated him from the moment they met. He started shaking and couldn't move. The dogs whined from the back of the car, and the sound helped him leave his seat. They stayed close to him, worried, as he walked to the house and didn't leave his side when he sat down in his living room.

His hands trembled, his heart raced and there was a lump in his throat.

"I'm sorry, so sorry, sorry…" Will whispered and pulled Buster to him, hugging him close.

He couldn't stop saying how sorry he was and the dogs reacted to his distress with fear. They whined, and it made Will feel even worse. He was betraying them. The pack was always there for him, and he would break them up and give them to strangers. A sob rose in Will's throat and he pressed his face into fur and wept.

"I'm so sorry. I will make sure you all get a good home, I promise."

Feeling one licking his hands, he raised his head and saw Wendy. He released Buster, who immediately snuggled at his side, and pulled the little Havanese mix on his lap.

“Maybe a family with kids, Wendy?“ he asked with a thick voice. She raised herself on her hind legs and licked on Will’s chin. “You like kids, don’t you?”

She did and the idea of giving Wendy something she loved, helped with the thought of giving her away. But it didn’t make breathing easier, and it didn’t soothe the pain. Just the idea of giving them up was gutting. Will laid down on the floor, carefully cradling Wendy to his chest. The other dogs huddled around him, and he felt so wretched that he could only lie there and shake.

Will woke up when the late afternoon sunlight shone on his face. He felt like he had just been put through a wringer. The dogs were lying around him, and their warmth and weight were calming the guilt and fear trying to rise again. Will heard steps, but the dogs didn’t react so he stayed put until the steps stopped. Hannibal stood beside him, looking down. He wore brown slacks and a cream turtleneck. Hannibal bent his knees and laid down so his head was opposite Will’s.

“Don’t,” Will said quietly, so not to wake the dogs.

“Don’t tell you how grateful I am?”

Will huffed, but didn’t answer. Hannibal was a hallucination; he could talk without waking the dogs, but Will didn’t have the leeway. He couldn’t tell Hannibal that it was his fault or about the anger he felt against Hannibal and himself. Instead, he closed his eyes and denied Hannibal that contact.

“You once called them your family. And then I used that description to make you see Abigail as family.”

Will turned his head away from Hannibal. He could not stop him from talking, but he wouldn’t encourage him either.

“I took you away from your pack – your family - when you were incarcerated.”

And then you gave them back, Will thought. A capricious god. Hatred rising and falling within him for a moment.

“I took Abigail away.”

Will clenched his fists and pressed his face hard against the floor.

“I took so much from you and now you are getting ready to sacrifice the family you just regained for me.”

“For me, for what I want," Will ground out. He had made the decision to be with Hannibal and that would be easier to accomplish without his dogs. He could still decide against it and keep them but it would mean being without Hannibal, being someone, something, he wasn’t.

Will stood up, and the dogs woke up around him. Sleepy eyes and yawning seemed to be everywhere. Will saw Hannibal still lying on the floor and turned his back to him. The dogs needed food, and he needed to think.

The dogs followed him. They were good and didn't beg or act up. They sat in the kitchen and behaved very well. From time to time Will looked over his shoulder as he was filling the bowls. He normally fed them outside, but when he turned around Hannibal was standing in the door of the kitchen. Will wasn't willing to have a confrontation so he just put the bowls down.

Then he fixed Hannibal with his eyes. "I won't let you manipulate me. I won't be your toy. We will be equals this time or I will take us down a higher cliff." He pulled his shoulders backwards and straightened himself up. "So you can either help me with your counterpart or leave me alone."

They stared into each other's eyes, neither willing to look away first, until Hannibal gave a tiny nod. Will released the breath he had been holding. Of course, that little concession from a Hannibal he imagined didn't help with the real one, but it was a start.

Later, when he went to bed, he pondered over what he wanted. If he was honest with himself, he had to confess that he wanted to be with Hannibal. Giving away his dogs was a small concession. Killing with Hannibal would be another. But after the dance with the dragon, he couldn't deny that he wanted it. He wanted to kill with Hannibal, but he didn't want to go around and slaughter everyone who dropped chewing gum on the street for meat.

Chiyo's words about other means of influence than violence came to his mind. He was reasonably sure that Hannibal would be interested in him when found out about his empathy, but without the encephalitis, Will might not be as fascinating as he was the first time around. Of course, this time he was already a killer. He wondered if that would help or hinder the planned... seduction. Will looked over to his hallucinated Hannibal with a fond smile. It would most likely help.

If he could forge a bond between them and bring them into a relationship of equals, he would negotiate and hopefully Hannibal would be willing to change a bit. If not, Will would have to change him.

The next week kept him busy with classes and careful research into his plans with Molly's husband. On Saturday he slept in as much as the dogs allowed and spent the rest of the morning with his student's homework. Hannibal was lounging on his bed while Will worked. He was in slacks and a white ironed shirt with the top five buttons opened. He was reading a book of fairy tales, of all things.

"Are you trying to distract me?" Will asked.

Hannibal lowered the book and smiled. His hair looked very soft, and some strands were falling into his face.

“Am I distracting you, Will?”

Will huffed involuntarily and gave the papers in front of him a glare before looking back to Hannibal.

“I want to be distracted,“ he confessed and stood up. He walked to the bed and sat down opposite Hannibal on the edge of the bed. Close enough to watch every detail of what his imagination had made up for him, but not so close that he could touch and destroy the illusion.

“What are you reading?”

“The Juniper Tree," answered Hannibal.

“I know that one,“ Will realized and felt embarrassed by his reaction when Hannibal smirked. Of course he knew it. This Hannibal only knew it because Will knew it.

“Will you read it to me, please?" Will asked.

Hannibal nodded without hesitation and raised the book. Will lay down beside him.

“A long time ago,“ Hannibal started. “There was a rich man who was married to a beautiful wife. They loved each other very much. But they had no children and…”

Will knew he was dreaming when he sat down at Mason’s table. Hannibal stood behind him, and Will could feel his watching eyes. Mason sat on one end of the table, Margot at the other, with Alana beside her. They had already eaten, and the bones of their meal were lying on the table cloth.

“If you bury the bones under the juniper tree, the child will live again," Hannibal explained from behind, and Will woke up with a gasp.

He was alone on his bed, and his eyes flitted around the room panicking until he saw Hannibal standing at the window. Will felt a whimper in his throat and swallowed it. He wanted to reach out, and it physically hurt to stay in bed. He lay down again, and curled up on the sheets. He had a moment of clarity about his past with Hannibal.

“It must have hurt to have me so close and not be allowed to touch.”

“Very much," was the immediate, calm answer. Hannibal’s voice was deep.

I gave you rare a gift, Will remembered Hannibal saying. *But you didn’t want it.*

“You wanted to give me everything," Will said thoughtfully. “And now I want to give you everything.”

Hannibal turned and smiled fondly at Will. “I hope you will be better received.”

Will swallowed and nodded. “I hope so too.”

“Relax, Will,“ Hannibal told him on Sunday evening as Will was reorganizing his books.

He was watching Will from one of the chairs in one of his suits. He was all closed off and proper. Will wasn’t sure what he found more alluring: the suits all buttoned up, or the more casual clothing Hannibal sometimes wore. Will assumed it was all a scheme of his own mind to make him contemplate the possible sexual component of the relationship he wanted to have.

“Will?”

He looked up from the unread-looking books he was holding.

“I’m sorry,“ he confessed. “I was distracted.”

“Are your books so interesting?" Hannibal asked.

“No," Will answered. *I was thinking about you,* he thought.

Hannibal crossed his legs and gripped his upper knee with his hands. He watched Will as if he was trying to decide how he wanted to continue. Finally, he nodded once.

“Have you decided yet if you want to work with Jack again?” Hannibal asked.

Will frowned and walked to the other chair. He moved it so that it stood opposite Hannibal’s chair.

“Are we back in therapy, Doctor Lecter?” Will squinted.

“We’re having a conversation, Will.”

The looked at each other, both smiling and Will decided to answer the first question.

“Working with Jack is an option. But I’m not sure it’s the best option,“ he looked away to sort his thoughts. “I will work for Jack if he makes contact on his own. As the Minnesota Shrike is dead, I’m not sure that will happen.”

“Jack might have come to you because of Garret Jacob Hobbs, but wasn’t the Chesapeake Ripper in the back of his mind?”

“Let me warm up on some cases and then throw me into the belly of the beast,” Will followed Hannibal’s thoughts. “Yes, you were probably what was subconsciously or consciously pushing him to pull me in.”

“So you will leave working with the FBI up to fate,” Hannibal concluded. He seemed thoughtful. “If you do work with them it would still be unclear if Jack would involve me.”

“I’m not as…,” Will hesitated to say unstable. He was different from before he met Hannibal. He was harder and less naïve about his own nature. He knew he was a killer and while he wasn’t willing to kill indiscriminately, he also felt no great amount of scruples about it. On the contrary, he was looking forward getting a chance to kill some people; Mason for example.

“I’m not afraid to look anymore. And I have the advantage that I will know some of… the killers.”

It might even be boring to hunt them down again.

“You can therefore not trust Jack to introduce you to this times’ Hannibal. But you could manipulate the situation to meet him another way.”

Will raised his eyebrows and leaned back; waiting for Hannibal to continue.

“Your most attractive peculiarity for me always was your mind and your ability to empathize. You hide this from the world now, but you could also put it out there. It would get my attention.”

“Do you want me to give interviews to Freddy Lounds?“ Will asked.

Hannibal shook his head a little.

“I was more thinking about publishing some articles, or even a book.”

Will looked at him a little dumbfounded. His own mind had surprised him. He internally went through the obvious questions. What should he write about and who would publish it? He didn’t ask them out loud as the answers came easily enough. He would write about killing and about the Chesapeake Ripper. Finding a publisher for true crime was doable. His agent from when he published his monograph might be able to help him. As a last resort, he could even team up with Freddy if no one proper wanted what he wrote.

“That’s an interesting idea,” he said. “And you would very much like that, wouldn’t you? Your very own admirer, who understands you. You would find out that Alana knows me and would ask for an introduction.”

“Or run into you by… accident,“ Hannibal confirmed.

Will liked it. It was like fishing. What he wrote would be the bait and when his prey bit he would pull him in.

“The other option I see is more… bloody," said Hannibal and interrupted Will’s musings.

“And what would that be? Bring you someone for your dining room table?” Will asked,

unsettled about the adjective.

“Yes,” Hannibal answered.

“Excuse me?” Will felt suddenly flustered and angered by Hannibal’s suggestion, and it took him a moment to realize why.

“I won't allow you to manipulate me into killing again,” he said resolutely and sat up straight.

Hannibal raised his hands in defense to appease Will. “The choice is yours Will,” Hannibal said.

“Yes, it is,” Will repeated with a hardness that surprised even himself.

“And I’m not specifically proposing that you…,” Hannibal hesitated and smiled almost shyly, “hunt for me. Although I find this a very engaging idea.”

Will avoided eye contact with Hannibal at that. He still felt angry but wasn’t sure why he had such a strong reaction. He had let his imagined Hannibal manipulate him to a lot of things in the last few weeks. He had let him help with Garret Jacob Hobbs. It might be the memory of sitting opposite Hannibal and being influenced that angered him.

“What are you proposing?” he asked.

“Eldon Stammets, Anna Shannon, Elliot Budish, Abel Gideon, Devon Silvestri, Tobias Budge, Larry Wells, Matthew Brown, James Gray, Katherine Pimms, Clark Ingram, Randall Tier,…”

Will stared into nothing as he heard the names and when Hannibal left the sentence open ended he whispered with want in his voice: “Mason, Francis, Bedelia…”

“I might get angry about Bedelia,” Hannibal interceded.

I want her, Will thought. But he was not able to voice the words.

His body was tense and ready to fight. He wanted all of them. He swallowed and looked at Hannibal. The heat that met him from Hannibal’s eyes burned him. He stood up and turned his back to Hannibal. His heart was racing, and his blood was pumping. He remembered Garret Jacob Hobbs’ blood flowing out of his throat into the unmarked snow. He remembered Francis Dolarhyde bleeding out in the light of the moon. The pressure in his body was not sexual, but the want he felt was as strong as any sexual urge he had ever felt. He wished Hannibal was here; a real Hannibal that remembered and could hold him or put a knife in his hand.

The other Hannibal, the one that remembered but couldn’t hold him, was speaking, but it took Will a while until he understood the words. Hannibal was telling him a recipe, the one they had cooked together with Freddy Lounds purported flesh. He closed his eyes and let himself go back to Hannibal’s kitchen and the smell of frying peppers and ginger.

Madness embraced Will in the following days and Will held onto it with want. The names of his killers were echoing in his brain whenever he was not occupied with teaching. He imagined the kills and the tableaus he could make out of their bodies for Hannibal. He also imagined getting caught and spending his life in jail or in the BSHCI. A killing series would be a love letter worthy of Hannibal Lecter, or a suicide note. He wanted, but he also wanted to kill with Hannibal and not alone, having no guarantee that Hannibal would even see them. That thought, more than any other objection, was what stopped him after a few days of feverish wishing.

He preferred to kill with Hannibal and recognizing this wish helped him with the want that burned in him.

The next weekend, shortly after Valentine's Day, Will sat down with his dogs at his feet and started to make notes about cannibalism. It was actually quite easy as he had done a lot of reading on the subject when he prepared his lessons about Garret Jacob Hobbs in the old timeline. He outlined the topics and structured them a bit. It wasn't a mess, and it wasn't good either. But first drafts nearly never were.

He worked on it for the next few days and put some meat on the bones of the text. He re-researched cannibalistic killers, and with each day it felt more like a possible book than a fancy. Hannibal informed him after the first read of the outline that it sounded acceptable. Will took that polite phrasing as a sign that it was boring as hell. He let it lie around for a few days and concentrated on teaching. That was also boring as hell.

"You are understanding me better with every day that passes," Hannibal commented when they were driving to Quantico one day.

"I'm getting more like you as well," Will agreed. "Putting on a mask for Alana, choosing victims, secretive getaways to commit murder…"

Hannibal's disapproval was loud in the silence.

"You meant in your obsession with me," Will said giving in, a smile was tugging at his lips.

"And yes, I get more like you in that as well. I understand you better now. It's hard to see someone you want and know you would not be accepted while you know at the same time that you are perfect for each other."

Alana waited for him that day after his lessons with a big smile. His hallucinated Hannibal stood beside her and he didn't look happy at all; very polite, but not happy.

"Hey," Will greeted her and saw Hannibal wandering off. "How are you doing?"

"Good," Alana answered. "I'm here to ambush you."

I don't want you to be ambushed, Will suddenly remembered her saying.

"This is an ambush?" he asked with a looming feeling of deja-vu and shouldered his bag. He kind of expected Jack to show up any moment. The students and Hannibal had left, and the two of them were alone.

“Well, I just spoke with an agent who is looking into adopting a dog or two. She normally works in the L.A. area and is here for 2 weeks for a debriefing on a case. I thought it would be good if you meet her as early as possible.”

Will blinked. He hadn’t forgotten about his plan to at least reduce the number of his dogs, but he hadn’t consciously thought about it either. The idea was still painful.

“I...” he started and stopped.

“You don’t have to meet her if you don’t want to.”

Alana looked at him very kindly, and Will wanted to remind her that he wasn’t as breakable as she thought he was. But this Alana didn’t remember what he was really like; she expected an easily-overwhelmed man that she wanted to support while he was changing his life in a direction that seemed more suitable in her eyes.

“No,” he said and fumbled in the jacket to get to his glasses. He put them on a bit awkwardly with only one hand. “It’s just a bit sudden. Do you want me to go now?”

He made himself sound a bit hopeful for the opposite.

“Megan is in the cafeteria right now,” Alana answered softly. “But if you want, I can arrange something for a later day.”

Will looked away from Alana and hunched his shoulders a bit.

“But she will be gone soon?”

Alana nodded and Will looked at her for a moment before avoiding eye contact again.

“Then we better meet now.”

Will had rarely been to the cafeteria when he was working with the FBI. It was after classes, so there were some trainees there, but he saw some agents he had met during the old timeline as well. He nearly froze when he recognized Beverly Katz at the table Alana was leading him to.

Alive, he thought amazed. Beverly was alive and not frozen and sliced and left like a lab specimen.

He wasn’t ready when they reached the table and had problems focusing on the introductions.

“Will Graham,” he said sitting down, after Alana had introduced Beverly and the blonde woman beside her. Beverly fixed her eyes on him.

“Will Graham, who wrote the standard monograph on determining time of death by insect activity?” she asked.

Will involuntarily smiled. Beverly had her priorities.

“Yes,” he answered, taking a serviette in his hands.

“Will teaches at the academy,” Alana intervened.

“About insect activity?" asked the blonde woman, Megan.

“More behavioral science,” Will explained. “I teach about behavioral patterns of criminals.”

“Doctor Graham, then?” Megan asked smiling.

Will started to rip the serviette in his hands. This was annoying, but maybe he could use it to find a way into Jack’s team without Jack coming to him.

“No, I’m more an autodidact. I have an… empathy disorder which allows me to empathize with anyone. It’s very bothersome when being in company, but it lets me understand the criminally insane.”

He looked at the serviette shreds while speaking, projecting the image of poor Will Graham, burdened by his gift. He could feel Alana’s surprise and also approval about his openness beside him and the discomfort of Megan. Beverly, on the other hand, looked as if she had found an interesting piece of evidence. Well, better than being asked if he was unstable, Will decided.

“You are looking for a dog?” Will broke the silence after a few moments and started a more relaxed conversation. Beverly excused herself after a few minutes of dog talk. Megan became actually more agreeable when they discussed her previous dogs and her plans for the future. Megan had a six-year-old and was pregnant. She planned to stay at home for the first few years when the child was born.

“Wendy likes children,” Will said hesitantly when he felt satisfied with Megan’s ability and personality.

Alana, who had sat silent beside them during the vetting, helpfully pulled up a picture of Wendy on her phone. Megan’s open smile at the picture helped to sooth Will's remaining worries. She was a good woman and honestly liked dogs. He would have preferred to have her closer to Wolf Trap where he could check on Wendy for the first few weeks, but maybe this was better for him; a cleaner cut.

They agreed that Megan would come over the next day with Alana to meet Wendy.

On his way back home his mind circled around the talk in the cafeteria. He had told at least one total stranger about his ability. In the past, he had always avoided this. But it had been kind of freeing to just speak about what he could do. It was the kind of openness Hannibal had always wanted from him: to show yourself and be real.

He wondered if that was what was missing from the book. He had planned to write it like a textbook, but maybe he could do it differently, more honestly. Maybe he could write from the perspective of the killers and show off how good he was. And he could end with a chapter about the Chesapeake Ripper from Hannibal's perspective. That would flush him out for sure.

But of course, it might be difficult to sell a book like this. It was right up Freddy's alley, and he thought that it would at least tarnish his reputation in law enforcement. Will huffed frustrated and gripped the steering wheel tighter. There were so many options, and he just didn't know which one was the right way to go.

"You don't have to decide which path to take now," said Hannibal from the backseat. Will startled slightly and kept hold of the wheel like his life depended on it. His pulse rose and he took a deep breath.

"You need to stop showing up while I'm driving," he said and consciously relaxed his shoulders and arms. "I don't have to decide?"

"Sometimes when you want to catch a fish, don't you have to cast more than one line until you catch it?"

Will frowned and kept glancing from the road to the rear-view mirror, in which he could see Hannibal.

"Yes," he answered.

"Right now you are on the water and have a few lines with you. Some are already in the water and others you can still cast."

"With real fishing, multiple lines are not so great. If more than one fish bites at the same time you are in trouble. But of course, I'm only after one fish."

"Don't dismiss having more than one fish biting. You had other admirers before," Hannibal interjected.

Will frowned again. Hannibal's comment made sense. He remembered Matthew Brown, but it made the already complicated situation even more complex. There were so many variables, and Will wasn't a big planner. That was probably why he kept the hallucination of Hannibal around.

When Megan and Alana showed up at his house, Will realised that this was the first time Alana had visited in this timeline. Well, he wasn't in his boxers or hammering holes in his

walls, so it was an improvement. The dogs were also happy to see her and Megan. Wendy liked her and Tart, his Molosser mix, was on her heels as well. Will couldn't help but huddle close to the two dogs when the women had left. He wanted to take them to his bed that evening, but he knew that if the next few play dates went like this one, he would let Megan take Wendy and maybe Tart if she wanted and he didn't want to make it harder by clinging.

"Cannibalism?" Alana asked when she and Megan had come over again a few days later. Megan was out with Tart and Wendy, and Alana had stayed with him and had obviously found the source material he had collected in the last few days. "For your lessons?"

"No," he hesitated. "I have an idea for a book."

She turned and looked expectantly at him.

Will ran his hand through his hair and avoided her eyes. "It's not going so well," he confessed to her. He gestured to the chairs and flinched, hopefully not noticeably, when she sat down in Hannibal's chair, who hadn't shown up in the last few days. Will sat down opposite her frowning.

"I'm torn between making it very much like a lecture and therefore boring to read and just writing some short stories from the perspective of the criminals."

"And the latter makes you uncomfortable," Alana stated.

Will nodded.

"I would rather not write something that could be published on tattlecrime.com," he said with a crooked smile.

Alana huffed amused, and Will remembered with a hot flush that this Alana didn't know how much he despised Freddy and why. He felt weirded out by knowing so much about Alana without her knowing his secrets.

"I can understand that," Alana said. "Jack, that is Jack Crawford the head of the BAU, is in a kind of a feud with her. She really likes to rattle him, and she is very often a step ahead."

Because she has little spies, Will thought silently and suppressed a smirk.

"Anyway," he pushed back to their first topic, "I don't want to make it boring, but I also don't want to write tabloid stories."

"Can't you balance the two aspects out? You could put both ideas in it. The perspective of the criminal and the analysis."

Will looked up at her and thought about it. It was an interesting idea as he could use two things Hannibal found intriguing; his ability to empathise and the capacity to analyze what he saw. They talked a bit longer about his project, and Will let himself be steered to the

compromise Alana had suggested. When Megan and Alana left, he had a promise from Alana that she would read the revised outline when he had it finished.

The next time he met with Megan and Alana, he brought Tart and Wendy to a park between Wolf Trap and Quantico. Megan took off with the dogs, and he walked behind her with Alana. He must have looked as tired as he felt because Alana hesitantly tried to find out if he had any problems.

“Just tired,” he told her. “I worked through some of the last few nights.” And the playdates for Megan were a lot more social interaction than he was used to. And his hallucinated Hannibal still hadn’t shown up again which made him feel antsy.

“On your book?”

Will nodded distractedly.

“It takes time,” he said, and as an afterthought, he added, “but I spoke with Human Resources about reducing, or at least stacking, my hours at Quantico better. I don’t know how you are able to drive all the way from Baltimore. That’s nearly double the time it takes me.”

The staff there had been really nice, and Will had left wondering what would have happened if he had spoken with Human Resources when Jack started dragging him into field work.

Talking more, Will had come to appreciate, *made people less suspicious*. Alana seemed to like him communicating, and they chatted for a while mostly about logistics and lesson plans. Will was exhausted when they left. The playdates had gone really well, and while Will still felt like a complete asshole for giving away his dogs, he could see that Megan was really good with them and agreed that she could take both, Wendy and Tart.

This time he took the 2 dogs to bed with him. He was just too tired to fight himself.

He woke up to find Wendy licking his face. Tart was nowhere to be seen in the bed, so Will pulled Wendy closer to press his face into her fur. She yipped happily at the cuddling.

Hannibal showed up again the next day. He was sitting in the passenger seat when Will started his car at the parking lot of the academy to leave for home.

“I missed you,” Will said without beating around the bush and watched his hallucinated Hannibal preen at the concession. “I thought about driving to your house and…”

Will stopped, unsure of what he wanted. He remembered the kitchen and the pleasure of watching Hannibal cook. The smell and taste of heavenly coffee roasted, ground and brewed while he waited. Hannibal had known, just from observation, that Will only took one spoon of sugar in his coffee.

He looked away from Hannibal and gripped the steering wheel. The motor hummed

soothingly. For a moment, his mind flashed back to Alana's first visit to his house. Hybrid, great car for stalking, he remembered and shook his head. He felt craziness licking on the borders of his mind.

"If you want to meet me earlier, that is possible, Will. Ask Alana for a referral and I'm sure my name will come up." Will pressed his lips together in sudden anger.

"I won't go into therapy with you again," he replied.

Hannibal was silent.

"And what kind of relationship will you be looking for if not that of patient and doctor?"

Will frowned and stared straight ahead, thinking about the question.

The Hannibal of this reality didn't remember what he remembered. He wouldn't lead Will as the old Hannibal had. Will had to make the decision which direction he wanted this to go and he wasn't sure. He wanted to have … no… he wanted to be Hannibal's whole world again. He wanted to run away with him, kill with him and…

"I want to be your everything again," he said and felt calmer after saying the words. He looked to the passenger seat to see Hannibal's reaction, but the hallucination was gone.

But the words followed him home. He knew what he wanted, and he was willing to do whatever needed to get it. Once again he thought that he understood Hannibal's first interactions and manipulations of him better now that he was in a similar position.

The task at hand wasn't just to meet Hannibal, he had many options how to make that happen, it was to meet him in the right way and to build a relationship Will could live with. Like not wanting to kill as indiscriminately as Hannibal did. Rudeness wasn't enough of a reason for Will. Will wanted to kill bad people, murderers to be specific. His Hannibal, the Hannibal he had pushed over a cliff, would probably have accepted that, Will thought dejectedly.

Megan and Alana collected Wendy and Tart the next day. Will was more distressed about the finality of it than he'd thought he would be. The dogs sensed it, and he hugged them close before he put them in the transport boxes Megan had brought. For a moment he wanted to call it off, and he was incredibly grateful that Megan and Alana pretend to chat at the front of the car while he said his goodbyes.

"Megan will be good for you and you will be good for her and her family, okay?"

Wendy pressed against the cage to lick his fingers as he spoke, while Tart just panted, excited.

"Oh god," Will groaned, and he wanted to curl up in a ball on the ground.

Instead of doing it, he stroked them one last time with his fingers through the bars and wiped his eyes with his sleeve. He dropped their bag, with beds and bowls and some favorite toys, beside the transport cages and closed the car door, not looking at them again. He pretended not to hear Tart whining.

Megan hugged him before she got in the car, but didn't say much, just that she would let him know how they were doing.

"What kind of alcohol do you have?" Alana asked when Megan and the dogs were out of sight. They ended up in front of his fireplace with a bottle of scotch, two glasses, his laptop and the remaining 4 dogs. He had Buster on his lap, and Alana was reading what he had written for the book so far. They were both a bit boozed, and he had never seen Alana this relaxed.

"You won't write about Dahmer," she says after a while, and he smiled. She was sharp and he should never underestimate her.

"It was about sex for him," Will said frowning.

There were a lot of cases, and he hadn't chosen all he wanted to include yet, but Dahmer hadn't even entered his mind. It was a popular case, but he didn't want anyone in the book that would take the main attention away from Hannibal. He wanted smaller cases that showed aspects of what Hannibal did so that he could build up to his little profiling exercise about the Chesapeake Ripper. But he couldn't tell Alana.

"I thought about putting in some fairy tales, but maybe that would get too much."

He had included a short version of the Juniper Tree before writing up a case similar to the one in the tale. A father unknowingly eating their own child through the deception of the mother.

"It's a very old taboo, and fairy tales show us that it has been broken for a long time."

"Are there more?" Alana asked and closed the laptop. She put it on the floor and took up her glass for another sip. "I can't remember any."

Will smiled lopsidedly.

"In the original version of Snow White, the huntsman is supposed to cut out Snow White's heart. But he lets her go and brings the queen a doe's heart instead." He let himself fall backwards, pulling Buster with him so that the dog was lying on his chest instead of his lap.

"Hm… that's right" Alana said and she lay down beside him yawning. "I had forgotten about that."

"Too much Disney," Will offered and Alana laughed.

One of the dogs – Larry - was encouraged by Will allowing Buster to lie on him, and had

taken over Alana's legs. She petted his head.

"I think I'm hungry," Alana said after a moment, and they both burst into laughter. Buster jumped off Will and looked indignantly at him.

"Sorry, sorry," Will told the dog when he sat up and stroked over his back.

He looked to Alana and found her watching him with an affectionate glint in her eyes.

Oh no, you don't, Will thought with a little anger and looked away. He didn't want her now, but she wanted him. Figured.

"How about sandwiches?" he asked.

They made them together in the kitchen and Will pretended not to notice that Alana kept dropping food to his dogs. They ate in the chairs, and the dogs surrounded her. One or two of them threw little guilty glances to Will and Alana avoided his eyes, concentrating more than necessary on her sandwich.

"Stop begging," Will ordered after a few bites. "And go to your beds."

They walked off one by one lying down in their dog beds.

"Sorry," Alana offered and Will rolled his eyes.

"You have the excuse that you are a bit drunk."

He was a bit drunk too. They'd emptied over half a bottle earlier, and they both still had a full glass left.

"You can have the bed," Will said, changing the subject.

"You don't have a sofa," Alana pointed out. He wondered if she was considering offering to share.

"Not the first time I've slept with the dogs. Might even be calming for me today."

"I might steal one of them from you," Alana said unexpectedly.

Will blinked and remembered Applesauce for a painful moment. If Alana already had a dog would she still rescue Applesauce? The question went through his head, and suddenly he felt his heart racing at the changes he was making.

"Are you okay?" Alana was watching him with a frown and Will took a deep breath to calm himself.

"Maybe today is not a good day to talk about stealing one of my dogs," he answered and rubbed his hands over his eyes.

Alana apologized, but the lightness was gone. He made his bed for her and cringed a bit when he thought about all his sweating. He should buy a new mattress, maybe a new bed and he should put it upstairs with bedside tables. It would be nicer than this and he would need it for… he stopped at the thought and felt the need to look around to see if his hallucination of Hannibal had shown up, conjured up by Will's traitorous thoughts. He was nowhere to be seen and Will relaxed a bit.

He lent Alana a shirt and some sweat pants. She had a toothbrush in her handbag, which was kind of disconcerting. The both drank a big glass of water and Will also swallowed an aspirin. He put some blankets and cushions down in front of the fireplace and the dogs settled around him when he lay down.

Will woke up a few times, but he didn't have to change his t-shirt and he didn't remember what he was dreaming about. He went back to sleep easily each time, feeling the warmth of his pets surrounding him.

He felt a hand touch his neck when he woke up the next morning. Wide and rough fingertips stroking the artery in his neck and Will involuntarily bent himself so that the fingers could touch him better. He could feel the smile he didn't see and smiled, satisfied with himself. The stroking stopped, and Will's smile weakened until he felt warm breath hit his skin at the same point the fingers had been. Heat shot through him and he took a sharp breath as he woke up with a start.

The dim light of dawn brightened the room and Will felt momentarily disorientated as to why he was on the floor. Then he remembered and a quick look at the bed told him Alana was still asleep. He stood up and shushed the dogs when they began to stir as well. He led them to the kitchen and out the backdoor. He touched his neck while he watched them through the window. The dream had felt very… erotic. He could still feel the arousal the simple touch had caused and he hoped that Alana wouldn't wake up too soon. He was only wearing shorts and a t-shirt.

He tiptoed around the house to shower and got dressed. His supply of breakfast ingredients was pitiful. He made coffee and cut some fruit. In his freezer, he found some bread rolls, which he put in the oven to defrost. He had some jam, eggs, and sausages, so he made scrambled eggs and sausages. When the table was set he remembered that this had also been the first meal he had shared with Hannibal.

"We will have a new first meal this time," Hannibal said behind him and Will didn't even jump at the surprise. He wanted to lean back and be embraced.

"Maybe you will cook it," Hannibal offered a little bit closer and Will imagined feeling his breath against the skin of his neck again. Hannibal stepped around Will and looked at the frying pan with the eggs and sausages. "You should put a lid on it to keep it warm, and wake Alana."

Will smiled weakly and followed the suggestion.

Waking Alana was easy, he just let the dogs back into the living room and pointed them at the bed.
While well behaved, they still enjoyed mischief when they had the chance. Alana squealed when some of the dogs licked her face and Will laughed at her following outcry.

He got some towels for her and was comforted by the realization that he would rather be in the kitchen with a hallucinated Hannibal than with a very real Alana. It helped him navigate the morning. Alana was adorable when a bit hung over and mussed from sleep, but he had the memory of Hannibal's breath and it was enough for the moment.

Alana told him that they had to do this again as she left and he stared after her, bewildered at her changed behavior.

The rest of the day he was exhausted, partially from having too much to drink, but also from the prolonged contact with Alana. He liked her, but during the last few months he had gotten used to being alone again. It was weird how quickly the years with Molly and Walter had been erased from his emotional responses. Maybe he was empathizing with his past self.

He walked the dogs, looking for Tart and Wendy, but they were gone. He was very sure that he couldn't give away another for a while.

He went to bed and when he woke up at 3 o'clock in the dark, he remembered Bella Crawford.

Will laid awake for a long time, remembering his few meetings with Bella and nearly all his interactions with Jack. He knew it was wrong to think about Jack, this was about Bella and while she was married to Jack, she was her own person, but he felt a lot of anger towards Jack and he couldn't help but come back to that anger.

He stood up around 6 o'clock, his mind still reeling and made coffee. Hannibal was sitting at the table in the kitchen and was sipping from one of his own coffee glasses. He was wearing a red and brown plaid suit and a red tie, and for once Will was absolutely sure why he had conjured Hannibal up.

"I think I'm in need of a consultation, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal was obviously not surprised. Without discussing it they moved to the living room and sat down in Will's chairs. He really needed to upgrade his furniture.

"What is on your mind?" Hannibal asked.

"Bella Crawford," Will answered.

"Have you ever met her?"

"A few times over the years, but I actually never really talked with her. I knew her through

Jack."

And he had empathized via Jack.

"Still you want to save her life," Hannibal pointed out.

"If possible," Will agreed.

"She had stage three lung cancer when I met her, Will. It was diagnosed too late to start more than treatments that merely delayed the ultimate end."

"It's earlier now. If she would know now, it might not be too late."

"It might also cause events to proceed very differently. Jack might take a sabbatical for her."

Will froze. He had half expected this, but still he was disgusted with himself.

"No."

Hannibal looked questioning at him. "No, Will?"

"I will help her and I will help Molly. No matter what it means for… us."

Hannibal only stared without any expression on his face.

Will, used to being the recipient of Hannibal's rare shows of emotions, found it annoying and glared back at him. To his surprise, Hannibal scoffed and placed his fingers together in a thinker pose.

"The quickest way for an early stage lung cancer to be found would be a low-dose CT. X-rays are often an inadequate diagnosis tool during the early stage. For Bella to receive a CT, a doctor would need to suspect lung cancer as a diagnosis."

Will was no medical doctor, but his hallucination of Hannibal seemed to know enough to be helpful. He wondered how that worked and decided he would check up on Hannibal's information later.

"Well her doctor obviously didn't suspect, so we either get her to see a different doctor or we need to raise suspicion that she might have cancer so that he looks closer."

"You would have to find out who her doctor is and have a look into his files," Hannibal offered with a minuscule frown. "It would be very time consuming and success will not be certain."

"You have a different suggestion I assume?" Will asked a bit impatiently.

"You won't like it," Hannibal said.

“You don’t say?” Will asked sarcastically. He couldn’t remember any plan of Hannibal’s he had ever really liked. At least not in advance.

The next free time Will could find, he took a plane to Maine, rented a car and drove to Molly’s house. His second time around he knew how to only temporarily disable the GPS. It was easier to follow up on his very simple plan of destroying Molly’s car to stop her husband getting killed than to consider Hannibal’s suggestion for Bella Crawford. Still, he felt guilty as the clock was ticking away in the back of his mind.

The house was a little snowed in when he arrived. He parked his car a good distance away and tracked through the woods in newly acquired and very cheap working boots that chafed horribly. He was not sure how close anyone would investigate the destruction of a car, but better safe than sorry. He arrived shortly before sunset and luckily the family was in. Both cars stood in front of the house. In the cold and cowering behind a tree, Will felt terribly homesick. He had lived in that house, his dogs had roamed these woods and he had felt happy at the time; broken and incomplete, but still happy. It had been peaceful and so very normal as long as he kept the yearning for Hannibal buried.

Will pulled up his memories from the hospital; Walter’s harsh words and Molly’s soft ones. If he wanted them to be happy, he had to let them go. He waited with the Red Dragon’s patience pulled over him like a blanket. Francis stood beside him in the dark and Will struggled to suppress all thoughts about where the mirrors were in the house. He wouldn’t go in. He was just there for the car, he reminded himself. It got dark and the lights were turned on. He kept waiting. Finally, the lights were turned off and it got quiet.

Will waited an hour longer and went to the car. In the dark and with gloves on it was hard, but after an hour of tinkering, Will was pretty sure he had destroyed the motor effectively. There was no way his footprints wouldn’t be discovered, so he took out the marker he brought and drew a swastika on the car to confuse matters a bit. It was a boring and annoying distraction, but he wanted this to be confusing for the local law enforcement.

He tracked back through the snow until he reached the road. He walked along it and hoped that no cars would show up. He would hate to take a jump off the road and he couldn’t afford to be spotted. If this were a murder case, dogs would be used to track him, but he was banking on vandalism not warranting a tracking dog.

When he reached his car the only thing he wanted to do was climb in, raise the heat as high as possible and drive home, but he didn’t have that luxury. He checked the camera he’d left to record the window and took a deep breath when he discovered that no one had come to check up on his car. He drove onto the road, left the car and listened for other cars. When he heard none coming up, he quickly went back with an electric torch and a big branch to destroy the wheel prints. He couldn’t do anymore, so he drove off back to the airport for his flight home.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

After the fall, Will woke up 9 months before he first met Hannibal and is assuming that he is time traveling.
Having successfully manipulating Garret Jacob Hobbs into committing suicide, Will is now trying to get in touch with Hannibal by following different options, like writing a book about cannibalism and making friends with Alana.

Chapter Notes

English isn't my first language and this fic is the first work I have finished in many years. I'm very grateful how positive the first two chapters were received.

Thanks so much for every hit, kudos, comment or tweet, it means a lot!

I'm very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17, dan_dresdner, obermietze and TayoAnn. Thank you so much for all your help!

All remaining errors are mine.

Will wanted some time to recuperate but time was running out for Bella. He started to stalk her to find an opening. He checked her workplace, her car, and the house. Hannibal had been able to break in to make his phone call, but Will wasn't sure how he had done it. Jack had a good security system. An accident involving a chest injury, Hannibal had suggested. Blunt force trauma that made it necessary to have x-rays or even a CT. He had also said that a physical assault would be better to control than a car crash or an accident. Will fucking hated the suggestions but couldn't see an alternative.

He hadn't decided yet how to proceed when a pretty big murder was presented on tattlecrime.com. A man and a woman had been found together in a barrel on a private sail ship. Their eyes had been switched. Will had been confused about this initially as no such murder had happened in his previous timeline, but after some thought, he assumed that the absence of Garret Jacob Hobbs' murders had caused another killer to step into his place. He had changed events already and continued to change them. Other monsters would come out of the bushes and show their faces. Still, it made him nervous.

Will continued watching Bella as much as he could. He had her schedule figured out, but the idea of a direct assault was still uncomfortable. He knew he was capable of hurting her, but

he didn't want to. His hallucinated Hannibal hadn't commented on his hesitation yet. Will was sure it was just a matter of time until he tried to push him into it.

After watching the Crawford's house for another evening, Will drove to a McDonald's nearby and got a coffee. He was pondering what to do next while watching some families gorging themselves on fast food. It was very normal and very not Hannibal. He had drunk half of his cup when the fire alarm went off. They were herded out of the restaurant, and Will had an epiphany in the parking lot of the fast food joint while he watched the staff trying to clear the smoky air from the restaurant.

Will decided to wait for a distraction before he went through with his plan. The opportunity arose when a second barrel with a second set of bodies was found a week after the first. Will heard about it when he was at Quantico and, after some checking, it was clear that Jack and his team were on the case. Jack would not be at home that evening.

But Will was, and as he had hoped, Jack's garage was not as secure as the house. Will broke in through a small side window, easily manipulating the latch. The first thing he did was disable the fire alarm in the garage by switching the batteries with empty ones he'd gotten during the day; the second thing was to check the door that connected the garage to the house. It was not locked; and when he opened it and checked the control panel of the alarm system, he saw that he hadn't triggered any alarms yet. He worked his way through the ground floor and kept switching the batteries for the fire alarms. If Bella or Jack remembered when they last switched the batteries and looked more closely into the issue, his tampering could be found out; but most people don't remember when they last switched the batteries in their fire alarms.

When he was done, he set up shop in the kitchen. He had his electric torch on the lowest setting and found an oil bottle close to the stove, some kitchen towels, and curtains which would do nicely. He turned on the stove, and when it was red hot, he spilled the oil bottle. He had thought he might have to help with his lighter, but the oil ignited beautifully without his help. He left the kitchen after the curtains had caught fire and exited the same way he'd come in. He made his way through the darkness of the back garden, careful to use the stepping stones so as not to leave footprints, and climbed up the garden wall.

From up on the wall he looked back and saw a red inferno behind the kitchen windows. His instinct was to call emergency services, but he knew he couldn't. He couldn't risk his voice being recognized. Instead he waited impatiently, half ready to run back in the house to drag Bella out. It felt like hours later but was really only about ten minutes, when the fire alarms upstairs went off. The upstairs lights turned on and he saw movement.

Will jumped down from the wall and waited, hidden, to watch what would happen next. Bella didn't try to do anything about the fire, she just left the house quickly, and to Will's delight, coughing. He didn't stay to watch afterwards. She was out and alive, and he couldn't do anymore for the moment. The cancer would either be discovered or not.

In the days that followed, he made a conscious effort to go to the cafeteria every day to see if he could catch any gossip. The first day nothing came of it, but on the second day, he saw

Beverly Katz in the queue to the cashier when he went in and hesitantly walked closer to her table with his own tray of food.

“Agent Katz?" he asked when he reached her table. Beverly looked up and closed the file in front of her. Will wondered if it was about the fire. He knew it was probably related to the barrel murders, but still. He was the suspect trying to get closer to the investigation to find out if he was in trouble. Paranoia was to be expected. He wasn’t as controlled as Hannibal.

“Will Graham,” Beverly said and smiled warmly. “Care to join me?”

Will breathed out as she had taken the initiative from him. “Yes, thank you.”

He had deliberately chosen mac ‘n’ cheese as a lunch option because he knew Beverly loved it. He eyed her plate and then his identical one.

“I see you have gone with the traditional food choice," he started and hated the conversation already. But asking how the wife of her boss was didn’t seem like a good intro.

“Mac ‘n’ cheese is always a good option. Haven’t met a cook who could mess it up yet,” Beverly explained with a slight grin. “So, Megan took your dog, didn’t she?”

Will didn’t have to fake his discomfort at the reminder of Wendy and Tart’s absence. He ducked his head and spiked some pasta onto his fork.

“Yes, she took two of them. They seem to be doing well and like living with Megan and her family.”

As an afterthought, he pulled out his phone and brought up a picture of Tart and Wendy with a child that Megan had sent him. He showed it to Beverly and smiled at her delight at the dogs and the kid, obviously very happy in each other’s company. They chatted a bit about dogs and he showed her pictures of the remaining pack and his plans to give up more of them. Will asked a few questions about Beverly and found out that she had a cat, but had nothing against dogs and was a connoisseur of classic rock. It made him conscious of the fact that he never really knew Beverly outside work; never really let her close. And now he was only doing it to gain intelligence. It felt wrong, but he knew he needed to do it; at least as long as he stayed on the path he had decided on.

“So,” Beverly said after they were nearly done with the meal. “This is nice, but you don’t seem like the usual small talk kind of guy. Any particular reason you were searching me out?”

He didn’t have an answer prepared for her. ‘How is your boss’ wife doing after I set fire to her house?’ wasn’t a good question. He looked down at the file, avoiding her eyes.

“I read about the barrel murders,” he said confessionally and slouched a bit. “I wanted to ask Crawford if I could take a look, but I haven’t seen him in the last few days, and I know you, so…”

“You decided to ask me.”

Beverly relaxed a bit, and Will felt himself mirroring her posture, relaxing in his chair.

“Jack is a bit busy. His wife is in the hospital for some tests, so I’m not sure when I can ask him if it’s okay to show you the case.”

Will nodded while fidgeting in his chair. Staying in the hospital for tests sounded promising.

“That’s okay,” he said and then had to remind himself that his old self would have been half eager and half hesitating; eager to help and hesitant to throw himself into an investigation. “I might see something, but I might not.”

Beverly frowned and Will remembered that she didn’t know what he could do. The last time she had seen him had been the first time Beverly had met him, and his short explanation of empathy wouldn’t really tell her what he could do.

“Hm…,” he stopped himself and took his glasses off. “I might be able to give you insight into how he thinks. Profile him, if you will. I can take leaps, due to my empathy, that can speed things up, or not.” He shrugged.

Beverly didn’t seem to know what to make of him, and Will felt himself getting annoyed with the situation. He pretended that he had to leave for his next lesson so that he could end the conversation and cursed himself on the way to his classroom. He actually didn’t have to be anywhere until later so he sat down in his classroom and opened the notes in his notebook. He stared at the pages until he lost patience and opened a new document.

‘About empathy,’ Will wrote, and suddenly it was easy to wring out words. He had never spoken about this in any structured form. He had given Hannibal insights and had let Alana see glimpses, but he had never really explained. He wanted to explain now. He wanted to explain to Beverly and to show off for Hannibal.

He felt his hallucinated Hannibal step up beside him while he wrote down how it was to be a living mirror; forever reflecting the world surrounding him, never being sure what was himself and what was the reflection.

He wasn’t finished when his class arrived and he had never been more annoyed by his students. He rushed through the lecture and let them go early with an assignment. It was hard to wait while his students left, but he managed. He was only a few minutes behind them when he exited the classroom.

Will was walking over the parking lot to his car when he heard his name. He turned and saw Beverly walk up to him. He froze in his movements. Right now, he didn’t want to speak to anyone, but couldn’t think how to brush off Beverly.

“So,” she said when she had reached him. “Jack Crawford said ‘when Will Graham wants to look at the case, he can see anything he wants.’”

Will flinched involuntarily and then balled his hands into fists when he realized what it meant: if Jack was so easily convinced to include him, he had been on Jack's radar before the Hobbs case.

He looked up to Beverly. "Lead on then."

He could see signs of surprise in Beverly. She hadn't expected him to jump immediately when Jack ordered, but he was kind of well trained. A strong feeling of self-loathing surged through Will as he followed Beverly to the labs. He tried to feel angry at Jack instead of himself. But if he was honest, it was his own fault this time around; he was willingly entering the lion's den without being lured.

The lab was familiar and Will felt himself calm down a little when he saw Zeller, Price, and Beverly in the room. Introductions followed, and he could feel the bewilderment about his involvement. In the old timeline, Jack had been there when they met and Will felt like he had less credibility now. At least this time he was not the 'favorite child.'

Will got the file and sat down beside an autopsy table to read it. He tuned out the lab and the three agents and concentrated on the case. Four victims had died within two weeks. The first two were found in a barrel on a boat at Ocean City and the second couple at the harbor at Virginia Beach. The team was currently processing the evidence of the second scene and re-evaluating the first case. The local police had done a good job. As one of the first victims had been involved in some organized crime it had been assumed that the murders were due to his criminal background. But the woman that was with him in the barrel had, as far as anyone knew, no connection to him. The most interesting information which hadn't been in the news was that mirror pieces had been found with the bodies. They had been holding them in their hands and Will was reminded of Francis.

When Will looked up about an hour later the trio were working on a body. Will cleared his throat and three sets of eyes suddenly looked at him.

"Can I see the mirrors?" he asked feeling uncomfortable with the attention.

It was Beverly who nodded and a few minutes later there were four little evidence bags in front of him.

"It's the same mirror," Will told Beverly before she could leave him with it.

"The same kind, definitely," she confessed.

Will nodded. "Because it's from the same mirror."

He put on gloves and removed the mirror pieces carefully from the bags. It took him a minute, but he was able to assemble them at the break lines.

"A lot of pieces are missing," Beverly said beside him.

"He got disassembled," Will said. "And he is trying to put himself together. He wants their

help to do so."

Will stared at the mirror and the Great Red Dragon was looking back. For a moment he lost his grip on the present and was back on the cliff. The blood was black in the moonlight. He blinked and was back in the now with Beverly at his side. Will cleared his throat.

"The first male victim, Marcus Donovan, was involved in organized crime. He did jail time a while back. The second male victim had a record as well. Try to match them. Speak with the LEOs at Ocean City to see if anyone can connect the second victim to Donovan."

"You think it's revenge?" Zeller asked and joined them at the autopsy table.

"Partially. They broke him, he is in pieces and…," Will closed his eyes and went a little deeper, "they are responsible, so it's their job to help him. They need to 'see' him, but they don't, so he gives them the eyes of someone that does 'see' him."

"The women," Beverly said. Will nodded.

"He knows them."

He pulled the victim's profiles to him again and laid them over the mirror pieces. One woman was black and in her 40s, the other biracial and in her early twenties. Will browsed through their profiles, but they had no obvious connection.

"They were kind. But I didn't deserve kindness, and neither did I deserve the cruelty the men heaped on me." Will realized his slip of perspective after he had spoken, but he was too deep into it to stop saying "I" now.

"I switch their eyes, give each the view the other had of me, and I give them a piece of myself as well. To make them understand who the real me is."

The last sentences he said in a rush; eager to get rid of the voice of this killer. He felt dull and unimportant compared to the Dragon or Hannibal. Just a poor little boy who had lost himself. *Boy*... Will thought and remembered something from the file of the older woman.

"Maggie Dursley," Will said and took her file, paging through it until he found the note. "She gave a child up for adoption… 23 years ago. Father is unknown on the birth certificate, but she lived in Minneapolis, as did Donovan."

Will looked up, expecting them to understand, but Beverly and Zeller were looking at him like he was crazy. Beverly's skepticism was tame compared to Zeller's thoughts. Open and receptive as Will was at the moment, he couldn't help but know what Zeller was thinking and feeling. Crazy Will Graham who talks like he is the killer and has delusions about being able to solve their case. He should go back to his teaching, and maybe someone should tell the board that his courses might not be helpful for future FBI agents. Will spared himself a look over his shoulder to Price and closed the files.

"Just check the child and check the victims for connections, they are all connected."

He hurriedly put the shards back into the evidence bags and grabbed his bag.

“I…,” he began unsure how to say his goodbyes. He looked to the floor feeling Zeller’s eyes on him. “I should go back to teaching.”

Will shook his head and fixed his gaze on Beverly. “Please check the child, okay?”

She nodded. “Sure, we will check it out.”

Later, Will couldn’t exactly remember how he left the lab. His first clear memory afterwards was sitting in his car and holding tight on the steering wheel in the parking lot. Hannibal was sitting beside him, watching the trees through the window.

“I was impressed by your very clear view of your own abilities and disabilities in regard to your empathy today. Your article will be a greatly enjoyable read when it’s finished.”

Will huffed. “You like the article and think your real counterpart will eat it up?”

“Rude, Will.”

Will started the car and smirked. He felt suddenly better.

“Well, I can be rude to you. You can’t eat me. You are not real.”

And he wasn’t afraid of this Hannibal. And he shouldn’t be afraid of the real one. Cautious, yes; but not afraid. There could be no fear between them if they wanted a relationship of equals.

Will drove back home with a sulking hallucination beside him. He ignored him, and when he arrived home he hugged his dogs one by one when they greeted him. After food and a walk, he worked on the empathy article. He smoothed out the rough edges he had left when typing it between classes and added some sentences and explanations. It was good, but he felt it read like a defense against the skepticism he’d felt earlier in the lab. He couldn’t look at it neutrally and, while nursing a scotch and broodingly hoping that Beverly would check the child, he made the decision to ask Alana to look it over instead of deleting it.

The next morning started with a headache from too much scotch and way too excited dogs. He let them out, took two aspirin and made breakfast for himself and the dogs. The painkillers started working when he was eating his eggs. It was rainy and grey outside when he left for Quantico. It wasn’t cold enough to freeze, but the rain changed the remaining snow to a soggy wet snow-mud that made the roads slippery. Driving was a nightmare, and he felt exhausted when he arrived at Quantico. He was not prepared for three special agents in his classroom. There were coffee and donuts at his desk, and Beverly, Price, and Zeller were sitting around, looking totally overtired and also over-caffeinated.

Will stopped at the door and stared at them, wondering if he was awake.

“We got him!” Beverly exclaimed when she saw him.

“The Barrel Murderer?” Will asked and blinked, slowly coming closer.

“Yes, my man,” Zeller exclaimed and raised a paper cup of coffee in Will’s direction. “The dead girl? Totally the daughter of the older two victims. And our murderer was a foster child with her for two years.”

“Local police arrested him an hour ago after we put out a note,” Price added as Will took the coffee from Zeller’s hand.

He felt a bit dumbfounded at their presence. They never celebrated the capture of a murderer, at least not with him. His empathy told him that they felt guilty about yesterday and he guessed that Beverly had suggested this impromptu breakfast as a gesture of reconciliation.

Will sat down and placed his bag against the legs of his desk. He made himself smile and was surprised how easy it came as the others smiled too. They got the bad guy and it was a nice feeling.

He sneaked himself a donut with chocolate and asked: “Jack didn’t want to celebrate?”

Zeller answered with his mouth full of donut, barely understandable: “’e’s at vuh hoffs’ital.”

“Still with his wife?” Will asked Beverly. She nodded without giving him any details.

Instead, Zeller entertained them with a description of the arrest that was probably completely made-up. Price kept interrupting him with some comments and Will kept smiling.

“Do you guys have the day off?” Will asked, after eating his donut.

“Unfortunately, no,” Price answered with a sigh. “We need to process the evidence that was found in his apartment as quickly as possible.”

“They are transporting it to us, right now," Beverly explained and looked at her watch. “Actually, it should arrive in the next 15 minutes.”

Zeller groaned and took another donut. Willing this break to stretch out for longer, Will imagined.

“Wish I could lend you my trainees,” Will joked

“Oh no,” Price shook his head. “Trainees are generally useless until a year of fieldwork. We don’t want them in the lab. They trip over bodies.”

He gave Zeller a side glance and Beverly laughed.

“That was one time!” Zeller protested. “And it was my first crime scene!”

Will couldn't help but grin at that picture. He was never close with the trio the first time around. They knew too much about him, and he wasn't interested in them, but this was nice. They didn't prod and still he was included. It was nice to see and feel the friendship between them.

Their breakfast ended when Will heard the door open behind him. There was a group of trainees standing in the doorway. They looked startled at the agents and Price noted: "We leave you with the ducklings then."

"Come in," Will told the students while the trio collected the remainders of breakfast. Zeller clapped his back before he left and told him he had done a good job. Will suppressed the urge to roll his eyes. The trainees were watching them, and Will wondered what kind of rumors would make the rounds after this.

Will left after his lessons, which went smoothly, and drove home. He felt warm inside from his encounter with Beverly, Price, and Zeller and back in Wolf Trap he lay down with the dogs in front of the fireplace and thought about a future without Hannibal.

It would be easy to frame him. Will knew so much. An anonymous tip to Jack about the cliff top property and the workplace. Hannibal was careful, but Will was pretty sure that the cliff top house wasn't clean from a forensic point of view. And Miriam might not have been brainwashed yet. He also didn't think the plan to frame Chilton had been long term. It had been more a matter of opportunity, courtesy of Gideon.

He could be caught without ever meeting Will. Will could be free of Hannibal. He could help Jack on occasion, maybe date Alana, keep his remaining dogs and have a carefree life like other people. It was a nice idea, and he was enjoying imagining it until Hannibal stepped up to him and looked down at Will.

"You would be utterly bored," he told Will, who closed his eyes for a moment trying to will the hallucination away.

"Shut up."

Hannibal scoffed.

"You are the one that is hallucinating me, Will," he chastised, and Will sat up with his back to Hannibal. The dogs stirred around him.

"You have tasted blood, Will, and you liked it. You have seen the beauty, and even if you blinded yourself, you would always remember. If you want an out, use your gun."

Blunt and purposefully hurtful, *like a scorned lover*, Will thought. He stood up and walked to his liquor. If he was being lectured by his inner Hannibal, he needed a drink.

"As long as you know I'm in the world you won't find peace," Hannibal stated. "This can

end in very few ways: our deaths, or us coming together. We are too deeply conjoined now, even if my current self doesn't know about you, you are still tethered to him. What did you write in your delightful little article about your gift? 'Pure empathy means being a mirror, but a mirror that gets burned by the images when they are being reflected on it too long.'"

Will filled his glass and then turned back to Hannibal, taking him in. He was wearing a red woolen sweater and red and white pajama pants. He had worn that before, when Will had visited him and it made him feel warm inside. Never before had his mind dressed Hannibal so casually when imagining him.

Will sighed and took a big swallow from his drink. The alcohol burned going down. *You are arguing with yourself*, Will reminded himself. There was no need to go on the defensive because this Hannibal only said what his subconsciousness wanted him to know.

"How will it work?" he asked instead of defending himself. "Will I move into your house and spend my time being drawn as a Greek hero until we go out to hunt for meat? It's not sustainable. It wasn't the last time around. That's why I wanted you to run."

"You wanted me to run because you were afraid of your own desires," Hannibal objected calmly. "You have given into those now and know that you like and want to kill." He stepped closer and Will took a step backwards, tumbling into one of his chairs. He felt himself blush at the direction his thoughts took.

"Please don't tell me you are not that boring, Will," Hannibal sounded positively annoyed. "Is it really the idea of intimacy that makes you want to wander off the path you have chosen?"

"No!" Will exclaimed, but he was embarrassed.

He jumped up from the chair and looked away from Hannibal.

"It was nice to see Beverly, Zeller, and Price this morning, okay?" he confessed. "I liked it. It was normal."

"You are not normal, Will. Pretending to be so is an insult against yourself. You are so much more than you pretend to be."

Will emptied his glass and looked angrily to Hannibal who was way too relaxed. Will wanted to strangle him to shut him up. Instead, Will left the room. He hid in the bathroom for about half an hour, tidying up his medicine cabinet. When he left the room, Hannibal was gone, and Will went to bed.

The next day it was clear that most of his students had heard about his involvement in the solving of the barrel murders. He had never had problems with discipline in his class, but on that day the atmosphere was saturated with respect that wasn't normally directed at him. *At least they hadn't clapped*, he thought afterwards.

Alana was waiting at his door when he went for lunch.

“The hero of the day,” she greeted him.

Will rolled his eyes. “People are talking?” he concluded. “I thought so when I saw the devout stares of some trainees.”

Alana laughed. “I think you always get some stares from the trainees. I know of one or two that had a crush on you in the last few years.”

She was walking in the direction of the cafeteria, and Will felt weirded out about the way his life was going. He was taking lunch with colleagues, like a normal sociable person. His fantasies of last night had been less stressful than the reality of normality. He wanted nothing more than to hide in his car or his classroom with the sandwich he had brought from home.

Alana got some greens, a small steak, and potatoes and Will followed her example. None of the science trio was in the cafeteria, and they sat down on their own. When Alana opened her mouth to speak, Will interrupted her.

“Sorry,” he said. “But should you consider asking how I feel, please don’t, okay?”

Alana closed her mouth and smiled, a bit embarrassed.

“I wanted to ask you, but okay, no talk about feelings.” She said the second half of the sentence very sternly and scrunched up her nose.

“Thanks.”

“How did you get involved?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “I read about the case. Something stuck with me so I asked Beverly if I could have a look. She spoke with Jack, I had a look, and the rest was done by others. No big deal. I just had a look through the file and gave them a profile.”

“Different from lecturing,” Alana said carefully, and Will had to suppress rolling his eyes.

“I was a police officer for a few years, Alana,” he told her, a bit defensive. “But it was actually more like lecturing than police work. I checked the source material, created the profile and told the team what I saw. Isn’t that what you do when you consult for a case?”

Alana remained silent, and Will realized that he was very defensive and that she wasn’t the old Alana, who bit back when you hurt her. This Alana was way too nice and didn’t want to hurt him.

“Sorry,” he rushed to say. “I wasn’t stressed when I looked through the file and gave them the profile, but everything else surrounding this, socializing with the agents, the student attention and …”

He stopped himself and Alana finished with a small smile: “And me.”

“And you,” Will confirmed, feeling a bit guilty. “Well, all that is kind of stressing me more than profiling a murderer.”

They fell into silence. Will wasn’t sure how to break it. He was picking at his food, it looked very unappetizing.

“How are the dogs doing?” Alana finally asked, and Will felt relieved at the very obvious change of topic.

“Buster is still looking for Tart sometimes, but otherwise they seem fine without him and Wendy.”

They chatted a while, about the pack and the pictures Megan sent sometimes. He ate most of his food and relaxed bit by bit.

When they left the cafeteria Will asked Alana: “I wrote more of the book and I also wrote an article. It kind of started as an introduction, but when I finished, it felt like an independent piece.”

“Want me to have a look over it?” Alana asked.

Will could feel himself curl up inside, but made himself answer: “It’s about empathy, my kind of empathy. I’m not sure what to do with it. I thought about using it as an introduction to explain the profiling essays. But I would have to shorten it and if that’s not possible…,” he hesitated for a moment, “I’m not sure if it is something of interest… no, a lot of people would be interested, but I’m not sure it would be helpful for others. And I wouldn’t want to publish if it doesn’t help others. It’s too personal.”

“I can read it considering the possible use for others,” Alana formulated her answer very carefully, and Will couldn’t help but smile a little. Very fine, breakable china indeed.

When their eyes met, he looked away but kept smiling. “I would appreciate that. I will send it to you via email?”

“Sure,” she said.

They had reached Alana’s classroom, and he was happy to leave her there after saying goodbye. Even overexcited trainees were better than this kind of conversation.

Back at home he spent a few hours with a scotch in his hand and Hannibal leaning over his shoulder to go over the article. The idea of publishing it was making him cringe, but just mailing it to this timeline’s Hannibal was not possible. Public print was the safest way to reach him. Still, the whole article felt incredibly personal. He had included some stories about his childhood that he had previously not even told Hannibal. The thought that someone like Chilton would read it and pretend to understand was disgusting.

“It’s beautiful,” Hannibal purred in his ear as he pondered over pressing the send button or not. “I will be interested to meet you after this.”

“To treat me,” Will murmured.

“That would be preferable, but if you are not available for therapy, what did you say there? ‘There are other forms of influence’?”

“Chiyoh said to me ‘There are means of influence other than violence.’”

“You will have to influence me differently then,” Hannibal said smugly.

Will looked up over his shoulder to his hallucinated Hannibal. He was wearing a red and brown suit with a black tie and handkerchief. Their faces were very close.

“You like the idea, don’t you? Me chasing you is a concept which flatters you.”

The corners of Hannibal’s mouth curled slightly, and Will could see a hint of warmth in his eyes.

“It reverses our roles from our first… dance. I believe it will be very enlightening for you to take the part of the pursuer, and my younger counterpart will be challenged with being hunted instead of doing the hunting.”

Will let the words sink and held eye contact with Hannibal, whose smile widened with every second Will didn’t look away. Then Will broke away, and he couldn’t help but look at Hannibal’s lips before hastily concentrating back on his laptop. He sent the email.

The next day was a Saturday, and when he woke up, he found an email from Alana in his inbox. She had sent it around 3 am in the morning, and there was an attachment on it: his own text with a timestamp and Alana’s name. He wanted to open it, but there was an email too, and he made himself read that one first.

After he had read her mail, he went to get himself a drink and stared at the text. Alana had praised it and listed why it would be helpful for psychiatric work. Her words didn’t feel condescending because poor, unstable Will Graham had opened up. No, she had sounded impressed and surprised, and she had highly recommended publishing it. She even suggested a few magazines and had offered to make contact with some editors she knew.

Smiling Will opened the file and started to go through her notes and corrections.

The next weekday he was at Quantico and felt weirdly unsurprised when Jack Crawford walked into his classroom after his last lecture of the day.

“Mr, Graham. I’m not sure if you remember me, I’m Jack Crawford…”

“Head of the Behavioral Science Unit,” Will interrupted. “Thanks for letting me have a look at the barrel murders.”

Jack smiled. He seemed tired, but not suspicious.

“I was surprised at Beverly’s request.”

“I would have asked you,” Will hurried to say. “But I hadn’t seen you. I assumed you were still at the crime scene.”

He was happy that he didn’t have a reputation for making eye contact and picked up his papers from his desk.

“More surprised because you hitched your horse to a teaching post.”

This was feeling more and more like a déjà vu. Will frowned a bit and placed his laptop in his shoulder bag.

“I only did what I do in preparation for my classes, Jack. I looked at the case and profiled the killer.”

Jack looked like a bloodhound that had found a trail. “My team was very impressed,” he offered.

He was trying to charm him, Will realized. This Jack didn’t know him yet. He shrugged and didn’t give Jack any opening. If he wanted Will, he would have to work for it.

“I was thinking that maybe you could help us once in a while,” Jack said, and Will suppressed a smile.

Gotcha, he thought, but made himself frown and shoulder his bag.

“Why do you want me? You have Heimlich at Harvard and Alana Bloom at Georgetown. She even guest lectures here, and you know her.”

He walked around his desk as he spoke, Jack followed him as he made his way to the door. It gave Will a little kick to be in the lead instead of being behind Jack. In this moment, Will made the decision that he wouldn’t just be Jack’s bloodhound this time.

“I don’t think Bloom or Heimlich would be as good as you. You have a very specific way of thinking about things.”

Will stopped at the door and looked back into Jack’s eyes.

“I take leaps, so I’m quicker. Which makes it more likely that fewer people die.”

“Yes,” Jack answered, a little baffled at his straightforwardness.

Will looked to the side as if to think. “I just cut down my teaching commitments. I’m writing a book and need more time for that.”

“Alright,” Jack carefully said. “But I don’t think some consulting on occasion would take that much time, do you?”

On occasion?! Will thought, enraged. Last time he had spent more time on airplanes and in the lab than in his classroom.

“It shouldn’t,” Will agreed. “We can try it.”

Will waited a moment to let Jack feel satisfaction before he added: “But this will not be covered with my teaching fees. Standard consulting fees, I would think.”

Jack’s eyes had widened slightly in surprise.

“You can speak with Human Resources; I will speak with Alana regarding what fees would be appropriate.”

Will held out his hand and Jack only hesitated for a moment before he shook it.

When Will walked to his car, he felt victorious in a way he never had before. He couldn’t help thinking that Hannibal would be proud. Not about the request for payment, but for putting Jack in his place.

“So,” Will said as he called Alana in the evening. “Jack Crawford wants me to consult for him.”

Alana was silent for a moment.

“He what?” She asked when she had recovered.

“Came into my lecture hall after I was finished and tried to flatter me with how much better I am than the usual profilers, and asked if I would consult once in awhile.”

Alana huffed and Will could imagine the expression on her face; a bit annoyed and a bit angry, but carefully veiled by friendliness.

“What did you tell him?”

Will couldn’t help but grin. “Told him I wouldn’t mind helping on occasion and that he should speak with Human Resources about consulting fees and I would speak with you about the same.”

Alana laughed and Will’s grin widened.

“Should I applaud you or should I be worried?” Alana asked.

“Either, both,” Will said quickly. “I can look into some files on occasion. It’s the same as I do for classes.”

“Hm…” She wasn’t reassured. Will could hear it in her voice. But she didn’t say anything.

“You disagree.” He offered her as an opening.

“I’m not sure if Jack will stop at showing you case files, Will. And I’m not sure it will be good for you, but…,” he heard her take a breath before she continued, “…I think as long as you say no when you need to, you will be fine.”

Will's eyebrows rose at that. Never before had Alana shown such confidence in his ability to protect himself. He wasn’t sure if this was a good thing or if it was bad. He had made his plans with the expectation that she believed him to be the same old poor Will Graham as before. Obviously, her image of him had changed, and she thought him stronger now. Hopefully that wouldn’t be a problem later on.

“I think so too. Now tell me, what is the usual fee for consulting as a profiler?”

A few days later Human Resources sent him an email with a contract for consulting. He read through it and signed it. He wanted to have a good relationship with them, so he went over personally, gave them the signed contract and made himself not run out immediately. One of them had heard about his wish to find homes for his dogs, and he was able to schedule a visit from someone interested in adopting one of his pack.

“Things are going smoothly,” Hannibal commented as Will sent the second draft of his article to Alana that evening.

“I find it exhausting,” Will commented.

“You worry too much, Will. As I told you before, you'd be so much more comfortable if you relaxed with yourself.” He smiled. One of those more or less honest smiles that he reserved for when he thought Will was charming. Like when Will bit a piece of meat out of the cheek of one of their kidnappers.

“Maybe you should pick up your little hobby again. Garret Jacob Hobbs was a success, wasn’t he?”

Will looked up over the screen of his laptop to his hallucination. Hannibal was dressed in the same clothes he’d worn the night they fell off the cliff.

“You want me to kill again.”

“No, Will,” Hannibal turned and looked at him sharply. “You want to kill again. We both know I’m just a figment of your wonderful imagination.”

Will looked away from him, out of the window to the trees.

“I have no pathology,” he said to try out the words. They felt true, he had no immediate need to kill.

“Neither have I,” Hannibal said and sat down in one of Will's chairs.

Will laughed and stood up, walking over to the other chair to sit down. “You eat people that you find rude. I would call that a pathology.”

Hannibal seemed disappointed at Will’s reaction.

“I don’t have to,” Hannibal objected.

“No,” Will agreed, after a moment. “That you don’t. But you like to kill. If you can, you feel more alive.”

Hannibal leaned forward towards him.

“Would you feel more alive if you killed one of your murderers?" he asked Will.

Will could only stare at him, frozen in a moment of decision. “I would,” he confessed. “But I’m already stressed now.”

“Why? You weren’t stressed when we were killing together. On the contrary, I have never seen you as relaxed.”

Will pondered over that. When he realized the answer, he felt himself flush. Will looked away from Hannibal.

“Will?”

“I,” he avoided looking at Hannibal, “I had nothing to lose then. But I have everything to lose now.”

He closed his eyes, waiting for the questions and Hannibal didn’t disappoint.

“What could you lose, Will?”

“You. I could lose you. If I get caught now,” he looked up. “Then I will never meet you.”

“So, you are stressing yourself over something you could have at any time. Just go and meet me if you are so impatient.”

“Sure,” Will drawled out. “Just walk up to you in the street, or better yet when you are grocery shopping.” Will straightened his back and said: “Excuse me, are you sure this waiter will work with the wine you bought yesterday.”

Hannibal was frowning at that. “Crude, Will.”

“Yes, well, this is what I have come up with so far.”

“You have been more creative before.”

“You mean when I dragged a body to your dining table, or took us over a cliff?”

“You have a certain flair for the dramatic,” Hannibal conceded. “And I promise you, my former self would be very impressed with a dramatic display. Tobias Budge or Clark Ingram would be my suggestion.”

With writing and lecturing going as usual, Will started to spend some of his free time stalking Clark Ingram. It was easy, Ingram was very predictable. The social worker had a very strict timetable, and the only variation came from his clients. Will wasn’t able to carry out continuous surveillance, but he had a good overview of his life. He was pretty sure that Ingram was choosing victims in the vicinity of his clients. Now that Will had Ingram on his radar he was developing a bit of concern for potential future victims. How would he be with Hannibal when he couldn’t stand the idea of people getting hurt and with Hannibal not feeling any remorse. He kind of wished that he could be like Hannibal; not feeling would be much easier.

His own reasoning while he had been luring Hannibal haunted him now. That kind of life was unsustainable. Hannibal was able to live like he did because he was very careful and also because he was ruthless enough to protect himself at all costs. The question was: could Will do the same?

He got a visitor a few days later from the Human Resources staff member who wanted to adopt a dog. Will didn’t let him in the house. Instead, they went for a walk through the snow with the dogs. It was nearly unbearably normal, and Will felt awkward the whole time. But the man, Tom, seemed nice enough with his pack and he had experience with dogs. Will could see that Georgie, Will’s German Shepherd mix, was his favorite. They agreed that there would be another meeting with just Georgie instead of the whole pack.

When the car drove off, Will felt a huge sense of relief and spent another night with the pack in front of the fireplace instead of in his bed. He still felt bad about giving them away, and sleeping surrounded by them helped a bit.

Another week went by. Alana sent the final draft of the article back to him, and Will sent it off for review to two magazines. It felt like sending off a love letter, hoping it would be well received. Will tried not to worry about it and spent some more time scouting Clark Ingram’s life. After a few weeks of it, he found it calming to watch his future victim. At least as long as he didn’t actively think about killing him.

The social worker always went for groceries on Friday evening and so far, he’d never had any visitors during the weekends. That was a very nice window for an abduction and kill.

Will was sure he could take Ingram, especially if he had surprise on his side. But he had a very specific idea what he would do with the body and was not sure how to make that happen without scouting Ingram's house in advance. As they hadn't been able to nail Ingram his first time around, Will had never been in his house and didn't know the layout.

His hallucinated Hannibal had advised him to just do it and work with what was in the house. Will had grudgingly agreed with him, and now he was waiting. He was honest enough with himself to know that he was procrastinating to avoid killing.

The idea stayed with Will for the next few days. When he told his students to think about killing he couldn't help but see the irony. He was thinking about killing and about logistics and alibis and tableaus that would get attention from Hannibal. He was still pondering his next crime during his lunch break when Beverly Katz walked in his lecture hall and invited him to the lab.

Jack wasn't there yet, but Price and Zeller greeted him with smiles.

"Heard you are joining our circus," Zeller said and pointed to a chair.

"I'm actually just consulting," Will said as he rolled the chair over to the team.

"Well," Price said as Will sat down, "still welcome. We are reviewing an old case for which we've got a new lead."

Jack didn't show up. When asked, the team told Will that he was at the hospital. Thanks to some soft prodding, Beverly told him that they had found cancer in his wife's lungs and Will felt himself relax slightly. Something had gone according to plan.

The case was two murders dating back five years. There had been another murder in Washington a few days ago with a similar MO. They went through the old cases and the new one to check for similarities. Will found it maddeningly boring, but he wrote down a profile and gave the team a few hints on what to look for when the body and the evidence arrived. When he left, they were still working. It felt strange not to stay, but also a bit freeing. He had taken some control.

Nothing special happened to make him go and kill Ingram in the end. He just woke up on a Monday and the thought of another week doing the same things he always did was unbearable.

He spent the week doing last-minute preparations and squeezed in a second meeting between Tom and Will's shepherd mix, Georgie. It went well, and they agreed on a date for Georgie to go to Tom. On Friday, Will left Quantico the moment his last class was over. He had bought another set of common, nondescript clothing, but had also taken a page out of Francis Dolarhyde's book and gotten some nylon to cover his hair and face. He got weird flashes from his impression of the Great Red Dragon when he put it on and had to suppress it by stepping into the memory of the fight at the cliff for a while.

When he opened his eyes again, he was still sitting outside of Ingram's house, watching from the shadows. Ingram showed up a bit later than usual and Will waited for another ten minutes in the cold before he moved closer to the house. Ingram had driven his car into the garage and closed the gate, but the garage had a side window with a loose lock and Will entered through that. He would have to check his own house for easy access via side windows, Will decided. He had entered Jack's house the same way after all.

He waited in the garage for a while, silently listening, and when he didn't hear anything he went to the door to the house. He listened again before he slowly opened the door. Dim light greeted him.

Will stepped inside and he felt the air move and then Clark Ingram jumped him with a meat tenderizer.

Will bolted on instinct, adrenaline shooting through him, and he fell back through the door in the garage. He rolled onto his side with a racing heart and made a sprint to bring some distance between them. He stopped when he had reached the back of the car, let his knife fall and turned to face Ingram. With both hands he was able to get hold of the arm that clutched the meat tenderizer. Ingram, for all that he was a predator, had not gotten the fighting training Will had in the police force and it showed. Will took some hits, but he had him disarmed and on his stomach on the ground within a few seconds. Memories of not having killed Ingram in the barn swept through Will and he reached for the tenderizer. *He wouldn't get the chance to get away this time*, he thought, and he lifted the tenderizer.

It took two blows to the head before Clark Ingram stopped struggling, and as the body under Will relaxed, so did Will. He took a deep breath and let the kitchen utensil fall from his hand. Will blinked under the nylon mask and realized that he was hearing noises he shouldn't hear. From the trunk of Clark Ingram's car came muffled crying and after a few more breaths to clear his head, Will realized that Ingram had a victim in the trunk of the car. This had suddenly gotten a lot more complicated.

For the next few minutes – which felt like an hour – Will suffocated in panic. When he had thought about Ingram's victims, he hadn't thought one would be present when he killed the man. He calmed down when the fact sunk in that the victim was in the trunk of Ingram's car. She hadn't seen him, and she couldn't get out without him. It would be manageable. And maybe it was a small grace as well, he told himself. He hadn't just killed Ingram. He had also saved a victim's life.

Will went to work, and about three hours later the tableau was as he wanted it. Ingram's house had provided him with a more suitable setting than he had hoped for. It was time to look after the girl in the trunk. She had been loud on and off, and right now she was loud, which was good. He opened the trunk as stealthily as possible and shone a flashlight into her eyes. He was still wearing his nylon mask, but better to overdo it instead of getting caught. She was tied up and gagged, but there was no blindfold. *Cocky bastard*, Will thought and pressed a cloth drenched in chloroform over her mouth. She struggled and then went limp.

Leaving her in the house was the safest option. He chained her to Ingram's bed with some handcuffs he had found. He put a water bottle, juice, bread and fruit on the bedside table and

a bowl beside the bed on the floor. He waited until she was nearly awake and then he fed her a sleeping pill and some water. It would give him some time.

Ingram's phone had been locked, but his laptop had a password hint and Will was able to guess it after a few tries. He smiled behind the nylon and took some pictures of the scene with the laptop's camera. Ingram saved his passwords in his browser so it was easy to get into his email account. Will typed his email to Freddie Lounds with some glee and attached the pictures. He pressed send and stood up. Time to go home.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

After the fall, Will woke up 9 months before he first met Hannibal and is assuming that he is time traveling.
Will has looked after some loose ends (like freeing Abigail from her father and making sure Bella Crawford's cancer gets discovered sooner) and is now trying to meet Hannibal. To make this happen, he has published an article about empathy, got involved with the BAU again and killed Clark Ingram for a special tableau.

Chapter Notes

English isn't my first language and this fic is the first work I have finished in many years. Again, many thanks for every hit, kudos, comment or tweet, it means a lot! :)

I'm very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17, dan_dresdner and obermietze . Thank you so much for all your help!

All remaining errors are mine.

I got fanart for this chapter!!! If you have a tumblr account, go and tell Carrioncrowned it's amazing!
The Stargazer by Carrioncrowned

The next morning Will woke up with what he now recognized as 'the morning after the kill' hangover. He had slept too few hours, and he would have stayed in bed if not for the dogs. He made himself not look up tattlecrime.com until he had walked and fed the dogs and had made himself some breakfast and coffee. Only then did he take his laptop and open the website. Clark Ingram's murder was on the front page. Freddie had placed her own pictures on the title page. They were better than Will's and they very much showed what Will wanted them to show. Hannibal would see it immediately. It just looked so much like the setup of chairs in Hannibal's office and Ingram… well, Will had spent an hour dressing him in his best suit, he had even put on a vest. The crushed head had not been planned, but nevertheless, it had given Will an inspiration. He had placed a mirror behind the cracked skull and another as planned on the chair facing Ingram's. His message was "I see you. I see inside of you." And it was written in bold letters.

They had found the girl too; Freddie had even spoken with her while waiting for the police. Will had left the coordinates for the burial ground in Ingram's coat pocket. Will wondered if

Jack would ask him to profile himself or Ingram when they found the other bodies.

But his different demeanor seemed to have changed Jack's behavior as well because he didn't call on him over the following days. Instead, Will received an answer from one of the magazines. They wanted his article about empathy. Could he offer a picture of himself? They would like to include it in the article.

When he told Alana, she told him that they would have to have a party at her place when the article came out. She wanted to celebrate, and she seemed so happy for him he couldn't say no. Also, in the back of his mind, he still hoped that Alana might become his gateway to Hannibal. Without being Will's psychiatrist this time.

Jack contacted him about Ingram's case nearly two weeks into the investigation. At that point, the case could be considered nearly cold. They had found the victims and evidence that Ingram was the killer of the girls, but they weren't sure who killed him and why. Already having most of the puzzle, Will still spent three evenings in the lab while Zeller, Price, and Beverly sifted through evidence and created a profile for Ingram and himself. He was satisfied no evidence which could lead to him had been found. He sent his finished profiles to Jack and was invited for a chat soon after.

As Jack's request to talk had not specified when exactly he should show up, Will took his time. He idly cleared his lecture hall before he made his way over to Jack's office. He didn't feel particularly reluctant, but he also wasn't keen on explaining his profiles to Jack. When Will had reflected on his own feelings he realized he mostly felt bored with Jack. For his plans, Jack was a necessary tool, but Will would have preferred not to see him at all. Will was honest enough with himself to know that his attitude stemmed only partially from resentment. He feared Jack for the threat he was. Will just wanted to be with Hannibal without having to worry and fear for their safety. He didn't want to live in fear anymore. And using Jack as he planned to invited scrutiny.

Reluctantly, Will knocked on Jack's open office door before he entered the room. For a moment, he expected Hannibal to be sitting in the second chair as he had been years ago when they had been discussing the Minnesota Shrike. But only Jack greeted him.

"Interesting profiles," Jack noted after Will had sat down.

"I wouldn't call Ingram interesting," Will said. "He was more a garden variety serial killer."

Jack huffed but didn't comment. He looked down at some printouts.

"Well, he is caught and it looks like we know all his victims, so any profiling is more for academic use."

"Yes," Will confirmed and waited.

"The other…," Jack started and looked up. "What did you call him?"

“An Admirer,” Will answered. He had written it all down but Jack stayed with his modus operandi of grilling Will for more.

“Why not an admirer of Ingram?” Jack asked, and that was actually a good question. Will knew what he himself had intended as a message, but it was hard to explain with the current evidence. Luckily, Will was known to make unexplainable leaps.

“He took a lot of time and effort to paint his picture, Jack,” Will said. “And the risk of inviting Freddie Lounds into this circus… I don’t think he did it for Ingram. Ingram was a message. He didn’t feel a lot about killing him. But he spent hours on arranging his body.”

Will had actually expected to be guilt ridden after killing again, but Ingram had been a worthless human being and his death and using his body as a message to Hannibal, was worth more to Will than having a serial killer alive. He felt some concern about not feeling guilt, but consoled himself with the fact that he still felt emotions at all. He hadn’t become a mirror to Hannibal. Even if he had placed a mirror on his place in the murder tableau.

“It’s a message and Ingram and Freddie Lounds are his messengers,” Will added.

“You think he will kill again?” Jack asked and stood up. He walked around his desk to check the board on his wall while Will spoke.

“I think it depends on how his message is received and what the answer of his intended will be.”

Will stood up too and turned to Jack.

“The answer might be a kill too, Jack,” he said gravely. He did regret that someone who wasn’t guilty of any murder would die for Hannibal to answer in kind. He had poked Hannibal, and his kill would be on Will’s conscience.

The weather was moving from spring to the beginnings of summer on the day Will drove to Alana’s house. He had unearthed the dog sitter he had been using in his old timeline, and she would check on the dogs in the evening and morning. Having a sleepover at a friend’s house was not a familiar concept for Will, but Alana had insisted. He was more nervous about her celebration than he had been about his murders and he had been plenty nervous about being caught when he killed.

He shouldn’t have been nervous about the celebration and he should have trusted Alana to know him. There were only three other guests and those guests were Price, Zeller, and Beverly. There was a lot of pizza and some fancy beer and some DVDs so that they didn’t have to talk too much with each other. Will could stare at the screen and not get anything from the movie when the social attention made him uncomfortable, and it was a good way to relax when Zeller made a move on Alana and didn’t get her rejection immediately.

Beverly grinned as this car crash evolved and leaned into Will to whisper: “Let’s get him drunk and then put him in a closet with Jimmy. Bet they would make out in under 15

minutes."

Will snorted and stage whispered back: "I'll lead Jimmy over and you manhandle Zeller."

Beverly raised her beer and toasted to him: "I like you Graham, you know that I'm the one that would be doing the manhandling."

Jimmy snorted and Will realized he had heard them both. He wondered what it meant that Price had not complained about being placed with Zeller.

All in all, it was a nice celebration. Only Alana and Jimmy had read the article and they didn't discuss it at all. Instead, they watched FBI movies and ridiculed the errors. It was very amusing. Zeller and Price left without any making out and Beverly crashed on the couch saying she would probably be gone in the morning. Will got the guest room and went to sleep after checking with his dog sitter via text message that the dogs were okay. They were.

The next morning, Beverly left in a hurry and Will had breakfast with Alana in her kitchen. She had bought bagels. Will felt displaced in reality by the normality of it.

"You have a very big house for one person," he commented thoughtfully.

Alana looked up and smiled. "Is that a come-on?"

Will made himself duck at the insinuation.

"No," he said and hoped he sounded embarrassed instead of irritated. "But I think you have a big house, and you live alone, and that you should take one of my dogs. Larry would be my suggestion because you would look ridiculous with small dogs like Marvin and Buster and Tom from Human Resources is taking Georgie."

Alana blinked and, to Will's surprise, she blushed a bit and looked to the side.

"I actually wanted to ask…" she started and then hesitated before straightening herself and looking back to him. "I wasn't sure if you were still giving them away, but I actually wanted to ask about Larry."

Will smiled widely and they spent the rest of breakfast discussing Larry and how she would have to prepare to take in a dog.

Will had just put his seatbelt on when his cell phone rang and he saw it was Jack's number. He answered the call warily.

"Will," Jack said without greeting. "Are you still in Baltimore?"

Will blinked and couldn't help but ask: "How do you…?"

"Beverly told me when I called her," Jack interrupted and Will felt relief that soothed the

onset of paranoia threatening to overwhelm him. “I want you to look at a crime scene in Baltimore. Are you still there?”

“Yes,” Will answered and added: “But I’m not sure I want to see a fresh crime scene, Jack. I agreed to consult, not to work crime scenes.”

“I want you to consult on this, and you should see the crime scene. It looks like the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Will had been ready to shoot Jack down, but the last two words changed his mind. He remained silent for a moment. There hadn’t been a Chesapeake Ripper killing at this point in his last timeline, but of course Will hadn’t left a gift-wrapped murder tableau for Hannibal the last time. He felt excitement and quickly thought about the practicalities.

“I can come, but I’m not sure my dog sitter is free this morning. If she isn’t, I might not be able to do classes in the afternoon.”

“I will speak with the academy,” Jack promised very quickly, and Will smiled sardonically. Jack would get his way.

“Where is it?”

Jack said he would text him the address and hung up. Will started the car and dialed up his dog sitter. She was able to go and check on them again. Will promised extra payment and thanked her profusely.

Jack’s text had arrived in the meantime, and when Will saw the address he had to smile.

Will felt a sense of resolution as he saw a very alive Beverly carrying equipment into the observatory. He ducked quickly behind the yellow tape as he saw Freddie Lounds taking pictures. He hoped she wouldn’t be interested in him with the crime scene inside and therefore he would not be as visible as he had been during the mushroom case.

Will walked into the all too familiar room with a fleeting mix of guilt and excitement. Hannibal had left him a crime scene, had left him art in it, and he couldn’t wait to see it.

The room was surprisingly empty. There were two agents he only knew vaguely, Beverly was standing with Jack close to the entrance, and Zeller was photographing the body.

“Hey, Jack,” Will greeted him and gave Beverly a quick smile.

“Freddie Lounds found it this morning,” Jack said gruffly. “Said she got another text message like the one she got from Ingram’s crime scene.”

“So, eager for a story as she is, she comes directly here and takes photographs before calling the FBI?” Will asked, a bit amused.

She had probably brought her gun, but still, she was willing to risk her life for a good story.

And from what he could see, Hannibal had given her some really good pictures.

“Can I have some time alone with the scene?” he asked Jack, and got an inquiring look for it and then a nod.

“Clear the scene!” Jack bellowed, and Zeller turned with surprise on his face. Somewhere in the back of the room Jimmy came up from behind one of the clothed desks. Will put on shoe protectors and gloves while the others left.

“Take as much time as you need,” Jack said and Will, knowing that Jack couldn’t see his face, rolled his eyes and nodded.

Then he was alone with his present and eager to unwrap it. He walked slowly into the room, savoring the presentation. For Hannibal this was very blunt, Will thought after a few moments of reconstruction. The victim sat on a chair and was gazing with empty eye sockets through the telescope. His head had been opened and then stitched closed, and Will assumed they would find his brain missing.

“Blind and stupid but still trying to see the stars, or better, a star?” Will shook his head smiling. It seemed he hadn’t impressed Hannibal with his own presentation of Clark Ingram. But of course, Hannibal couldn’t know how Will knew his office so well; he would assume one of his former patients was behind it. Will wondered for a moment how many there were and if he could make Hannibal frenzied enough to go after the lot of them. He closed his eyes again and hastily built a new version of the observatory in his own memory palace. There were four versions of this place now: Frederick’s dissection, Miriam’s arm, Beverly and, as of today, the Stargazer.

It took him a few moments to let go of his smile. But then he straightened and walked to the door. Jack and the others were waiting behind.

“It has been a while since I looked at the Ripper’s file, but I think this is him,” Will said without preamble.

Jack took a visible breath and asked: “And…?”

“It’s pretty easy actually,” Will shrugged. “Blind and brainless, looking up to the stars. This is an answer and a challenge.”

“For whom?”

Will turned and looked at his present again. He thought about what to tell Jack and decided on a half-truth.

“I think for someone who sent the Ripper a message.”

He looked to Jack. “I can’t be sure, but I think the message might be the Ingram case and this is the reaction of the Ripper.”

Jack frowned, not following Will's jump and Will shrugged.

"Like I said, I can't be sure. I might be able to explain it when the evidence has been processed."

Will slunk out of the observatory and found Freddie Lounds at his car.

"Hello," he said with a thin insincere smile and hoped he seemed harmless. He wondered who had sicced her on him. He didn't think it had been Zeller this time.

"Mr. Graham, may I introduce myself?" she offered her hand to Will and he had again a feeling of déjà vu. "I'm Freddie Lounds."

Just Hannibal at his back was missing and, of course, now Will knew who she was and what she was capable of.

"Hmm… you have some kind of webpage, right?" he asked innocuously and shook her hand quickly.

"A news site, yes," she said.

Will nodded like he was just politely listening and stepped around her to his car door. He could feel her bafflement at his disinterest, and it helped him subdue his antipathy.

"I hear you are working for the Bureau?" Freddie asked from behind him.

Will opened his car door and looked back at her.

"Oh yes, I teach at Quantico and sometimes consult on cases."

Freddie regarded him, a bit unsure. "Are you consulting on this case?"

Will pulled his phone out of his jacket like it had just vibrated and looked at it.

"Please excuse me," he said absent-mindedly while looking at his phone. "I have to run; my dog sitter is having some trouble with my pets."

He got in his car and looked up before he closed the door. "Have a nice day!"

Will drove off wondering if he had made this first meeting worse than the original one he remembered. If Freddie researched him, which she would, she might find out that he wasn't as guileless as he had presented himself. But on the other hand, it had been fun to just ignore her. Attention was her life blood and denying her of it was a pleasure.

He used the excuse the crime scene visit had given him and went home. Jack had cleared his afternoon from teaching, and he would be a fool not to take the time off. His dogs were happy to see him after a night without him, and he felt the coming threat of separation from

more of them in his whole body. He sat down in his living room for a while and petted the dogs and thought about the crime scene. It had been a bit insulting.

He had to send Hannibal a fitting answer; maybe Randall Tier to show again how well he knew him. But there would be no beasts for Randall this time; he was a familiar canvas to paint a picture for Hannibal. The question was, what would Will paint? He needed to think about it. It had to be perfect. After all, it would be a letter of admiration in the same way Ingram's body had been an invitation to play.

The next day, before Will went to work, he checked his emails. To his surprise, the magazine had forwarded him a few emails regarding his article. Will scrolled through them and for a moment he hoped there would be an email from Hannibal, but of course there wasn't. Writing an email would be way too direct. But Will laughed aloud when he saw that one email was from a Dr. Frederick Chilton. It was a very crass little piece, supposed to sound charming. He complimented Will on the article and invited him to meet. There were some veiled offers to visit the BSHCI or a more intimate setting if Will preferred it. Will snorted, and his first thought was to tell Hannibal so that he would get a kick out of it. Then he remembered that he couldn't tell *the* Hannibal… yet. And his hallucination had made itself scarce in the last few weeks, most likely because Will felt he was on the right track and didn't need him as much as before.

After class that day, he went to the lab and checked the autopsy results. As expected the brain had been removed. While the agents were working on the evidence, Will sat down and wrote a profile of the Chesapeake Ripper. He stayed as close as possible to the truth and mostly left out certain details that would lead to Hannibal too quickly. He included the idea that the surgical trophies were eaten, but made a note that he was currently writing about cannibalism and that this might have influenced his perception. The note should ensure that Jack wouldn't take the idea too seriously.

In the evening he answered most of the emails. He left Frederick's to last and replied that he was flattered by the interest, but was currently working on a book and had no time to participate in studies. He ignored the suggestion of a more intimate meeting completely.

After Will closed his laptop, he went out into the dark without the dogs. He walked a circle around the woods surrounding his house, his little ship of light in the dark. He pondered his change, his willingness to kill and the darkness he now carried inside him. He had no intention of bringing Hannibal to justice or living a normal life again. But he was aware that he should think about it; that and the fact that it did not rattle him much anymore.

If Hannibal were there, he would have walked beside him with one of his proud smiles. His pride at Will's becoming would have shone in the dark of the night.

Randall Tier's workshop had been found in the old timeline, but only because they had looked for it. When Will broke into it a few days later, it already showed signs of his growing obsession with becoming an animal. It looked like he would come into his own at a similar time as the first time around. Animal mutilations would be the next thing he would do. Will took a survey and the workshop had ample material, but not everything he would need for his

tableau. Some shopping would be required.

The preparation took another four days in which Will slept very little. Jack insisted on updating him regularly on the Ripper case. He still had his full class workload and the preparation of Randall Tier's demise. One night he dreamt of giving his students "How to steal a heart from someone's body" as homework. Hannibal made his art displays look easy, but the amount of preparation that went into it made Will doubt Hannibal ever slept. It was impressive, and Will wanted to impress back. He didn't have the advantage of being Hannibal's fledgling this time, and he had a feeling that there would be less tolerance for mistakes.

While he was hiking to Randall Tier's workshop, he considered getting another car for this kind of outing. Hiking to and from the killing scenes was exhausting. He had taken a taxi to the area but hadn't dared to get too close to the workshop which was a little off the track.

Randall's shift at the museum would end in an hour, and he always went straight to the workshop. Will had some time for preparations.

When Randall arrived, it was pitifully easy. Will threw a wire around his throat to strangle him. Randall was so surprised and startled that Will was able to push him to the ground and pull the wire tighter. He tried to buck Will off, but he wasn't strong enough. Will called upon the memory of Buster lying bleeding in the snow and pulled the wire tighter until all struggling stopped. His heart raced, and he felt alive and strong, and he wanted more. The dragon roared in him, and Will gritted his teeth to stop himself from biting through the nylon mask he was wearing.

Will took a deep breath and then another and then one more. It made him calmer, but his heart was still racing.

He waited for a few minutes more and then let go of Randall. He looked smaller than Will remembered. Will stared and tried to find the beast he had seen before, but he couldn't find it.

It was a bit disappointing, and in a flash, he realized that he had to incorporate it into his design. This wasn't the killer he remembered, and it would be evident for Hannibal too. He had made a mistake in coming up with a design for the Randall he remembered. Will huffed and stared at the workshop. He had an idea. It would be a repeat, but even his Hannibal wouldn't know as he had never seen the tableau Will had left in the Lecter's castle.

It took hours and Will had to stop again and again to let the sweat on his skin dry. But it was beautiful when he was finished, and he yearned to be there when Hannibal saw it.

Will transported him in a plastic sheet and used Randall's own car to drive them to the museum. It was 3am in the morning, and it was later than Will had planned, but the museum was quiet and still. He had only carried pieces of Randall the first time around, but this time he had to drag Randall and half of the contents of his workshop. It took ages. He had to take out a security guard when the man nearly stumbled over him. He chained him up in a broom cupboard and checked the security office to ensure he was the only one. He left the museum

after sending another email to Freddie, including some pictures, with Randall's phone.

He wanted to check Freddie's site but didn't want to turn on his phone to avoid leaving a GPS trace. He also didn't want to be reachable to Jack. He was pretty sure he would call for Will to come, and Will wanted to go home first.

The tiredness hit him when he was halfway back home, and he had to stop at a fast food joint to get coffee. He paid cash and parked as far as possible from the building to avoid cameras. The coffee made him jittery, and he was wrecked when he arrived at his house. He let the dogs out and took the bag of clothes he'd been wearing into the barn. He had bought oxygen based bleach a few weeks ago, and he drenched the clothes and shoes in it. Then he went and took a shower after getting the dogs back inside.

Freshly showered and feeling a bit more awake he checked his phone. The landline had three missed calls from Jack and when he turned on his cell phone, it exploded in activity. There were another two missed calls from Jack and one from Beverly. Also a few texts. Will returned Jack's call while he started his laptop to check tattlecrime.com.

"Will, why didn't you answer your phone?" Jack bellowed the moment he took the call. Will felt himself flinch a bit at the behavior. *Rude*, a cold voice in his head whispered.

"I'm coming down with something and turned my phone off to sleep in?" Will asked back, miffed.

"We have another body in Baltimore, most likely the Ripper or his … 'admirer.' Freddie Lounds got another hint and called us after posting about it on her website."

Will smirked at it. Good old Freddie. Tattlecrime.com had loaded while he took the call and he saw his own pictures of Randall in a chrysalis of bones with a dog collar on and a cut leash.

"I see it," Will said realizing that he had been silent for a while.

"I want you here to look at it," Jack told him resolutely.

Will sighed. "Jack, I took some cold medicine and can't drive for a while."

"I will send a car," Jack said and hung up. Will looked at the phone, disgruntled, and put it to the side to read the article. Jack would be Jack, and while he would prefer to sleep, it wouldn't hurt to be at the crime scene. Just in case he had lost a hair or something.

Freddie's article wasn't too bad. She had written a timeline of the kills so far and was suggesting that the two killers, one most likely being the Chesapeake Ripper as the brain was missing, were facing off. She must have a source inside the FBI again because the missing brain of the stargazer had not been made public knowledge. Or she was just guessing.

She wasn't wrong about them facing off, Will thought and wondered what Hannibal thought.

He must be annoyed at this point, but hopefully also entertained and amused at Will's antics. Will was pretty sure that he made a better show than Tobias Budge had made, but he wasn't sure how Hannibal would see it. This Hannibal was a bit of a mystery after all. He hadn't met Will; hadn't been changed yet.

The car showed up 45 minutes later; Jack must have sent it from Quantico. Will wrapped himself up like he was really sick and sat down in the backseat while the agents drove him to Baltimore. He slept a bit on the way and got woken up by Zeller knocking against the window.

"You look horrible," Zeller told him gleefully.

"Thanks," Will said dryly. "I have a cold. Not sure why Jack wants me here. I could just look at the evidence at the lab."

"Ah, but you are our new mascot," Zeller said, grinning, while they were walking into the museum.

Will frowned, but the man seemed to be genuinely teasing him.

"I have replaced you?" he asked.

Zeller looked uneasily back to him and then decided on grace and laughed. "Good one, Will."

The crime scene was busier than he had left it, but they had kept it reasonably undisturbed. Jack was definitely starting to fall into familiar patterns. Well, familiar to Will.

"Will," Jack said as he saw him. For a moment, he seemed to worry about seeing Will tired and sick, but then he appeared to push any worries to one side. *Good old Jack*, Will thought.

"Jack," Will greeted.

"We left everything as it was. Take as much time as you need."

Jack told the others to leave the scene, and while the agents left, he told Will about how the body and the guard had been found.

After Jack was gone, Will closed his eyes for a while and then walked the scene. He made sure to be everywhere he had been before. He felt a sudden kinship with Hannibal when he had been allowed to visit crime scenes with them. Hannibal had been so delighted and amused, and Will understood him so well right now. But he was tired, so he kept it short and went out to Jack after a few minutes.

Will told Jack half lies and half truths: it was the same killer as from Ingram's death, the kill hadn't happened here, and the image suggested that the victim was a symbol of a connection to someone -most likely the Ripper- that the killer had cut.

"You think they know each other and had what? A falling out?" Jack asked while the agents

went back to process the scene. Will shrugged.

“Maybe, or he knows the Ripper and wants to show him that he is independent, or the Ripper urged him to show independence, or the victim is somehow connected to the Ripper. Maybe I will be able to say more when the body and the scene are processed.”

Jack huffed.

“I will need a lift home, Jack," Will reminded him. He wasn’t amused when no immediate car and driver was offered. Jack suggested he wait in one of the cars outside until someone was free.

Will called Alana in the hope that he could crash on her couch until Jack was willing to give him a lift. Her home wasn’t too far from here.

“Hey," she greeted him when she took the call. He heard noise in the background.

“Hey," he said back and felt suddenly shy to ask for a favor, but it was too late now. He’d better fess up or she would drag it out of him.

“So, Jack dragged me to a crime scene in Baltimore and now has nobody to drive me home for a few hours.”

She didn’t reply immediately but then huffed loudly.

“You really shouldn’t let Jack walk all over you, Will.”

“I know," he said, and he didn’t have to fake the chastised tone. “Could I crash at your place for a while? I can take a taxi and won’t be a bother. I just want to lie down for a bit. I think I’m coming down with something.”

“I’m not home, but where exactly are you?”

He told her the address, and then he heard muffled talking.

“I'm with a friend, but we will be there to collect you in about half an hour.”

“Okay," Will said, relieved. “Thank you.”

He went back to the front door to wait while he kept an eye outside. There was a lot of press there, and he thought about how he could leave without being seen. He checked with one of the police officers and was shown a side entrance. He texted Alana the details and got an instantaneous answer that they would meet him there.

When Will saw the familiar Bentley drive up in the side street, his feet moved without thinking about it. He stopped himself and waited, trembling, until they had come to a halt, Alana had exited the car and was waving for him. Then he moved again. He felt like he was

dragging his legs through a stream and his heart was racing. He didn't feel ready to meet Hannibal, but on the other hand, he couldn't avoid it now.

Alana smiled at him, but he could see her annoyance too. He was pretty sure it was directed at Jack and not at him.

"Sorry for crashing your Sunday," Will said when he reached the car.

The driver door opened as well and Hannibal was standing only a few steps away from him. He was glorious, too young and too polished.

Will couldn't help himself, he met Hannibal's eyes for a short moment. He wanted to keep looking at him, to drown in his eyes, but he couldn't. He looked down when he heard Alana speak.

"Don't worry about it, Will. But I will give Jack a piece of my mind. May I introduce you to my friend, Dr. Hannibal Lecter?"

Hannibal reached out with his hand and smiled at Will. It wasn't a real smile, not a you-just-bit-out-someone's-cheek-and-I'm-so-proud-smile, but it was for Will, and he drank it in greedily.

"Will Graham," he said, and forced himself let go of Hannibal's hand. "Sorry to get you involved in my mess. And thank you for the lift."

"A pleasure to meet you," Hannibal said charmingly. "And any friend of Alana's is very welcome to the use of my car."

They got back in the car and Will couldn't resist sitting behind Alana so that he could watch Hannibal. He wasn't sure what he should say next. Hannibal wasn't ready for any of the important words, and also, Alana was here. It wasn't surprising to Will that it was Hannibal who bridged the silence between them while he was driving them to Alana's house.

"I must confess, Mr. Graham, that I'm not completely selfless in my offer to drive you and Alana. I recently read your article about empathy and was very impressed."

Shy and unsocial Will Graham, Will reminded himself.

"Hmm… thank you. But Alana is the one to praise if anything is impressive. My draft was very poor before she went over it."

"I made only cosmetic corrections!" Alana protested.

"And also pushed me to publish it. Without that push, I would most likely have buried it."

That was probably enough to present the old Will. Hannibal seemed relaxed, and his eyes kept scanning the back mirror to watch Will. Will tried not to meet his eyes.

“You work as a medical doctor, Dr. Lecter?” he asked before the article could be made into a bigger topic.

“I did until a few years ago," Hannibal answered slowly. So, Alana had mentioned Will’s general aversion to psychiatrists.

“Hannibal was my mentor at Johns Hopkins," Alana interjected.

“You are working in psychoanalysis now," Will stated. There was no reason to use kid gloves on him, and he needed to show that he had some teeth. Their eyes met in the mirror, and the corners of Hannibal’s mouth curled a bit. Will took it as a success.

“What gave me away?”

“Mostly the avoidance," Will said and yawned. "My apologies."

Alana turned in her seat to look at him. Will made himself look away from Hannibal and to Alana.

"You don't look so good," she said with a worried glance.

"I might be getting a cold. If I can crash on your sofa that should help."

"Maybe Alana's guest room would be more suitable," Hannibal suggested, and Will looked back to him.

Chicken soup, Will thought and remembered the taste of Hannibal’s dark skinned chicken soup with sudden clarity. Will wanted to crawl into Hannibal's lap and forget anything else in the world. He looked away from Hannibal and caught Alana watching him.

"I don't want to cause more trouble than I already have," he told Alana. And he wasn't actually sick, so the attention wasn't really welcome. He just needed sleep and Hannibal, but if he couldn't get the latter, he would settle for sleep.

"You are no trouble, Will," Alana urged him and looked to Hannibal.

"I hope I didn't disturb your plans?" Will asked.

There was a short silence and Alana and Hannibal exchanged a look. Will could feel possessiveness rouse inside him. Alana wouldn't get him this time. If he had to drag her to Margot he would do it, but Alana wouldn't get Hannibal.

It was Hannibal who answered Will's question.

"I believe Alana is a bit relieved about the distraction. I had planned to take her to a wine tasting and failed to realize that she prefers beer."

"I never told you," Alana interjected as an excuse.

Will realized how much she tried to smooth over the edges of the talk. He wondered if she wanted to pacify him, or Hannibal, or both. He guessed himself.

"So, I saved you from having to consume high priced alcohol. Beverly would be very disappointed in me."

Alana laughed.

"How are Beverly, Zeller, and Price?"

"Sifting through a crime scene under Jack’s watchful eyes," Will said. "Makes me very happy that I'm just consulting."

Will realized that he recognized a street and they would be at Alana's soon. His time was running out.

He desperately wanted to say something to extend that short moment they still had, but he couldn't think of anything clever.

"You have just recently picked up consulting, I believe?" Hannibal asked.

"I agreed to occasionally consult on cases that are difficult."

"Like the recent killings," Hannibal concluded, and Will smiled inwardly.

Wouldn't you like to know more, he thought, *to crawl into my mind and my memories and get all the information and insights about yourself and the killer that wants your attention.*

"Yes," Will said and looked to Alana. She didn't seem suspicious about Hannibal's question. But why should she, this was her mentor, a respected colleague and friend.

"I must confess some very prosaic curiosity about these two killers," Hannibal said

"They are very public," Alana interjected.

"And I can't discuss them with anyone who isn't either working the FBI case or who hasn't signed a confidentiality agreement."

They arrived at Alana's street, and it saved them from delving deeper into the issue of people with confidentiality agreements. Hannibal pulled smoothly into the driveway and Will hesitantly got out. To his surprise, there were no awkward goodbyes. Instead, Hannibal followed them into the house.

Inside, Will tried to pull his coat off and felt himself flush strongly as he felt broad hands helping him from behind.

"Thank you," he murmured and turned to take his coat only to watch Hannibal hang it up. He

caught a look from Alana that told him they would talk very soon, but even that idea couldn't make him stop from keeping his eyes on Hannibal's back.

No comment was made from either of the psychiatrists as Will followed them into the living room. He was torn between asking for a place to sleep and staying in Hannibal’s company. He knew it would be better to make Hannibal work for it and be hard prey, but leaving his presence seemed impossible right now.

"I believe some tea would be very beneficial for Will," Hannibal said before anyone could sit down and after ignoring some protest from Will, Alana and Hannibal left him in the living room for the kitchen. It was strongly suggested that he lie down and as he couldn't follow them to the kitchen without being ridiculous, Will lay down on the sofa.

He closed his eyes, and the lack of sleep caught up to him. He dreamt of lying in Hannibal's office in front of the fire while Hannibal was drawing him. He woke up with a warm feeling of completeness and felt cold when he realized that he was on Alana's sofa with a blanket over him and Alana sitting in an armchair. She looked up when he moved and put the book she had been reading down.

"Will Graham," she said with a suppressed smile. "You have been holding out on me."

Will blinked, still half in his dream, he couldn't make sense of what she said and frowned.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean your very visible appreciation of Hannibal Lecter," she said, obviously amused.

Will didn't blush. Visible appreciation was harmless compared to some other things Alana had said about him and Hannibal in the old timeline, which only Will remembered. But he knew the old Will would have blushed and tilted his head to look to the ground to avoid her eyes.

"I didn't know you..." Alana hesitated and Will felt a bit confused about what was to come. "...are bisexual?"

Frowning Will looked up, but still avoided Alana's eyes. He wasn't bisexual. If asked he would say that he was hetero, but what he felt for Hannibal transcended his orientation, but he couldn't explain it to Alana, and he didn't want to.

"He seemed interesting," Will said instead of an explanation of his orientation. He sat up and pushed the blanket to the side.

"Interesting," Alana said playfully. He shouldn't have introduced her to Beverly.

"Well if he was only interesting, you probably don't want the card with his number that he left for you?"

Blood rushed through Will and straight into his face and stomach. He looked up abruptly and found that Alana seemed serious. Amused, but serious, and she was pointing at the table in front of the sofa. A cream-colored card with black lettering was there. Will snatched it up without hiding his excitement. On the back of the card was Hannibal's cell phone and home number in familiar fancy handwriting. It was beautifully made - as artful as the image of the man it presented to the world.

He is interested, Will thought and stared at the card. He heard Alana chuckle warm-heartedly and he didn't care. She wasn't important. Important was that Hannibal had left him his card.

"Did he say anything?" Will asked. He probably sounded a bit silly.

"He would like to receive a call or text so that he can have your number," Alana said smiling.

Will reminded himself that he should feel shy and looked over his glasses to her. She seemed pleased about the development.

"He is normally much more reserved," she told him. "Leaving you his card while you are sleeping is a bit blunt for him. I would say he would very much like to hear from you."

Will really wanted to pull out his phone, add the numbers and call Hannibal straight away. But he would have to think about this a bit. He took the card and put it in his breast pocket without following the urge to stroke the writing.

"I will contact him later," he said resolutely to end this topic of conversation. "How long was I asleep?"

There was no clock in Alana's living room that he could see.

"You slept for about three hours. Hannibal left an hour ago," Alana answered. Which meant he was here for two hours while Will slept. Will wondered if they had spent the time in the living room or somewhere else. Somewhere else was more likely. He might have slept through a reading Alana, but he couldn't imagine sleeping through a talk between them. Pity, Hannibal liked watching him when he was vulnerable.

Will pulled out his cell phone and found no calls from Jack. His frown must have told Alana what she needed to know.

"No news from Jack?"

"No," Will said a little annoyed.

"Then let's make new tea for you," Alana suggested and Will nodded. They went into the kitchen, and Alana put on a kettle. Without him asking she started to tell him about Hannibal and how she had met him. Some of it was new for Will, and he found himself listening with attention.

When the tea was brewed, they sat down at Alana's kitchen table, and Alana gave him some

silence while they drank.

He was grateful that she left him alone and after finishing the tea they went over the house and the changes she would have to make when she adopted Larry. During his explanations, his phone rang to tell him his lift home had finally been arranged.

On the way home, Will felt the card burn through his breast pocket. His mind and his empathy told him that Hannibal had seen his interest and reciprocated out of curiosity in his gift. He wouldn't have the chance to be his psychiatrist in this timeline, but going down the dating route was another way to get close. Hannibal liked his amusements close.

Will's heart, on the other hand, wanted Hannibal to want him like the old Hannibal Lecter had. He wanted to be the most important person in Hannibal's life. Will smiled and touched the card through the fabric of his shirt. Madness was licking at the corners of his mind. He wanted to have his own Hannibal back now and it would be so easy to just give into his imagination and conjure him up. But he was so close to a flesh and blood Hannibal that he decided against it.

The dogs were happy to see him when he came home, and he used them as an excuse not to deal with the card right away. He thought about Larry leaving him for Alana and knew it should make him uneasy, but his excitement at having Hannibal at his fingertips was overwhelming.

Still, he made himself stay out for half an hour and let the dogs run a bit. When he went back inside, he sat down beside his phone and took out the card.

What are you thinking? he wondered and let the pendulum swing. *Meeting Will Graham, whose article told you about his gift. You made your assumptions, and you find him interesting, but your focus is not completely on him. There is a killer out there who really wants to impress you and his displays have piqued your interest.*

Will closed his eyes and sighed. He rubbed over his eyes and shook his head at the realization that he was distracting Hannibal from himself, which was a bit fucked up, but he should have expected the possibility. He wondered which version of himself would be more alluring. The killer or the empath.

“Only one way to find out," Will said and picked up his phone. He dialed the number and listened to the dial tone. With sudden clarity, he remembered calling Hannibal and telling him *they knew*, but pushed the memory aside.

“Yes," Hannibal greeted him when he took the call.

Will swallowed “Hannibal” and said: “Hello, Dr. Lecter.”

Are we no longer on a first name basis? the Hannibal in his memory asked and it made Will smile.

“Will Graham," Hannibal said and Will didn’t hear the fondness he wanted to hear. He pressed his lips together. This would be an exercise in patience, like fishing. He could do it. He just needed to be patient.

“Thank you for leaving your card. It surprised me, I didn’t think I made a very good impression.”

“Impressions are subjective," Hannibal said. “After a short night and a stressful morning, I was impressed by your stamina.”

Will's breath stopped, and he made himself breathe in very slowly and controlled so that no sudden intake could be heard by Hannibal. Did he know? What else could he mean with a short night?

“Well it wasn’t a short night," he said, maybe too quickly. “Just one that got interrupted a lot as I kept waking up. But thank you for… being impressed.”

“I assume you are on your way to rest?” Hannibal asked. He sounded a bit worried.

“Yes," Will just said.

“Then I’m honored that you would call me first.”

“Alana phrased it that you would very much like a call," Will said. He felt uncomfortable with the flirting tone. His normal flirting with Hannibal involved more blood and bodily harm.

“I did," Hannibal just said in his usual shameless way.

“She also told me you are a very good cook and I thought… I might be bold and invite myself for dinner.”

“I always enjoy company for dinner," Hannibal answered and he sounded delighted. Will could basically see the recipes and ingredients juggling in his brain. He probably wanted to feed him someone as soon as possible.

“I thought, to make it a challenge to your skills and bring the meat. See what you make out of it without any prior warning.”

There was a moment of silence on the line and when Hannibal answered Will could hear a small smile. He had gotten him.

“I would like a challenge," Hannibal answered and Will smiled as well.

“Then I will provide one," he promised. “When do you want me, Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal suggested the coming Saturday evening, and while Saturday seemed like a very long time to go, Will accepted it. He would need some time to go fishing beforehand and

Saturday morning would be a good time to do that.

He held the phone a long time after they had ended the call. The yearning he felt was only bearable thanks to the memory of the love and attention his Hannibal had shown him in their lost future. But knowing Hannibal didn't feel the same now was painful.

A low whine pulled Will out of his thoughts. Buster was standing beside him and was looking upset. The little mutt had been a bit clingy in the last few weeks, and Will assumed it was due to the other dogs leaving. Will bent down, took him in his arms and carried him until they were both seated in one of his armchairs. Buster was excited at the sudden attention and was wriggling. Will hugged him and pressed his face into the soft fur around Buster's throat.

"Sorry I'm sending your family away," he murmured and stroked his fur. His own neck was getting a tongue bath and he just let it happen. Larry, Marvin, and Georgie came closer and surrounded Will, ready to be cuddled too. Will felt another bout of guilt for abandoning his dogs for Hannibal's sake. He let Buster down and sat on the floor for some cuddling that ended up in wrestling. The guilt stayed, but the unconditional affection of the dogs made him feel better.

The week dragged on. A few times Will wanted to conjure up his hallucination of Hannibal again, but he didn't want to distract himself from the real one and resisted. Instead, there were lessons and a lot of driving and time in the lab to tell Jack more about how he had killed Randall Tier. He took Georgie to his new owner's home and hated every moment of the drive to and from there. The house felt empty with just Buster, Marvin, and Larry when he came back, and he spent another night in the middle of a now smaller dog pile.

Alana called on Thursday to ask about visiting Larry on Saturday, and Will spilled the beans about meeting Hannibal and going fishing for him. Alana was overly excited in Will's opinion and offered to look after the dogs for the day. He made her promise not to tell Hannibal that he would be bringing fish. He should have made her promise that she wouldn't tell Beverly because that's who ambushed him on Friday during lunch.

She slung her arm around his shoulders after sneaking up on him while he was filling his tray and had no excuse to leave before he had eaten.

"Will Graham," she said and lead him in the direction of a table with a plate and food on it.

At least, Will thought, *Zeller and Price aren't here.*

"Alana told me you have a date tomorrow."

Will groaned and took a seat.

"She really shouldn't have told you," he said, pissed.

"Don't be angry with her. We went for drinks, and it took a few until she spilled," Beverly tried to sooth him. "I think she was just glad to speak to someone who knew at least one of

you two. You surprised her.” She leaned back in her chair. “Me too for that matter.”

Spearing a tomato with his fork Will looked up and asked: “Because he’s a man?”

Beverly waved the idea off. “More because you barely tolerate me and the guys socializing with you. Didn’t think you would openly flirt with someone.”

Will sighed.

“He was interesting," he said defensively.

Beverly grinned. “Alana thinks he’s hot," she poked verbally.

Will felt the old jealousy rise up again.

“He is good looking," Will agreed and he could hear himself sounding bitchy. He concentrated on his food. The sooner he finished it, the sooner he would be able to leave.

“And a doctor," Beverly added. “Sounds a bit like a romance novel, doesn’t it?”

Will ignored her and ate. He knew she didn’t get why Hannibal was important and only teased him as she would do with any friend. But he was nervous about their first meal together, and she wasn’t helping.

At his concentrated silence, Beverly seemed to get that he wasn’t up for teasing and pulled back.

“Have you decided what to wear?” she asked cautiously.

Will blinked and let the fork in front of his mouth sink.

“I haven’t thought about that yet," he said. He had been more concerned about having no luck with his fishing than with how to dress. “He was very well dressed. So, something more fancy than I normally wear.”

“Do me a favor, send me a picture after you’re dressed up, okay?”

“Why? You don’t think I can dress well?”

She snorted.

“Naw, just proof of existence and blackmail material should you ever date a lumberjack.”

She blinked at him with a smile, and he smiled back against his will and shook his head.

They spoke about the case afterwards. Nothing new had come up, and Jack was pretty driven about it. Will was very glad not to be as regularly on Jack’s team as he had been in the old timeline. He remembered these phases very well and associated them with less and less sleep

and a lot of nightmares and guilt.

On Saturday, he woke up dreaming that Jack had called him out to a crime scene and he had to show up at Hannibal's without any offering. For him it was a pretty tame nightmare, but he still felt unsettled. He expected a call from Jack any moment, but it didn't come. Of course, Hannibal knew he would be indisposed if a crime scene came up and as he wanted to meet, he hoped he wouldn't put any obstacles in Will's way. That was probably where his anxiety came from. The fear that Hannibal didn't want to meet him. He felt a bit stupid when he realized it.

Alana was early for her play date with the dogs and had brought too many treats. He went fishing after a minimum of interrogation and the cold and quiet of the stream helped him to calm himself and relax. He caught three beautiful fish and couldn't wait to see what Hannibal would make of them. His smugness must have shown when he came back home because Alana had a consistent fond smile on her lips as she watched him prepare for the meeting. She called it a date, just like Beverly had, and laughed when he frowned.

He showered and cleaned up his beard. Too late he realized that he should have gone to the hairdresser, but shrugged it off. He shouldn't cater too much to Hannibal's taste. But he didn't use his aftershave.

He dressed in a good suit and styled his hair a bit. He didn't see a big difference, but Hannibal would see that he had made an effort and that was what counted. When he came downstairs to leave Alana took a picture of him, and Will blinked, surprised, before he realized that she must be in cahoots with Beverly.

"Really?" he asked her dryly and mostly ignored the dogs who wanted attention. There was already dog hair on his clothes, he didn't want to get anymore on them. He went to the kitchen while Alana was preoccupied with her phone.

"Tell Beverly hi and that you both are really bad people."

Alana only laughed and Will wondered how it had come to this. He had opened up to Alana simply for the purpose of getting to Hannibal. Having her as a friend was a bonus, but he was unsure how their friendship was so much closer and different from before. He wasn't that much of a different person, at least from Alana's perspective. The biggest likelihood was that he didn't want a romantic relationship with her and that made him more confident. He hoped it was that and not his manipulations.

When he came back to the living room, Alana was cuddling Buster and her phone was in her hand.

"Beverly says you are smoking," she said with a fond smirk. Her eyes wandered to the cooler he was carrying.

"As I said before, bringing Hannibal fresh fish is a stroke of genius. How did you get the idea?"

Will smiled. “I empathized with him, of course.”

Alana laughed not knowing that Will had looked so deep into Hannibal that he wasn’t sure he could ever fully look away.

It was getting dark when he arrived at Hannibal’s. He parked in the driveway, blocking Hannibal’s garage, but not thinking about the liberty he was taking. The cooler felt heavy in his hand as he walked up to the door. He was nervous and excited and - sad because…

Will hesitated at the door. He wasn’t sure why he was sad, but seeing the house made him feel melancholic. Abigail was hovering in his mind, but it wasn’t the old pain of losing her that affected him. Abigail was free of her father and Hannibal and him.

The door in front of him suddenly opened without him having rung the bell. Will looked up startled.

Hannibal stood in front of him in a charcoal and red plaid suit and a light grey shirt.

“Will," he said and smiled his polite fake smile. “I thought I heard a car.”

Hannibal’s eyes wandered over Will and paid special attention to the cooler. His smile became a bit more real, and Will couldn’t help but smirk a bit.

“Hannibal," he said. If he moved to a first name basis by calling him Will, he was taking the same liberty. Hannibal’s eyes moved up and their gazes met. “I was admiring your home. May I come in?

Caught, Hannibal immediately opened the door wider. “My apologies, please come in.”

Will followed him inside, and his sadness changed to nearly overwhelming homesickness. He was home, but it wasn’t home. Right now, Hannibal’s house was just a place he had once felt at home.

He placed the cooler on the floor and let Hannibal take his jacket. To his surprise, Hannibal touched him more than he had expected. But maybe it wasn’t surprising, Hannibal had obviously decided to play into Will’s interest to get closer. He wondered how far Hannibal would go and how far he himself would let it go.

Hannibal put away Will’s coat, and when he came back his eyes wandered again to the cooler.

Will pickedit up and held it out for Hannibal, watching his eyes when he spoke.

“As promised... I caught them this morning.”

Hannibal’s pupils dilated slightly at his words, and he took the cooler with an appreciative

smile. Will decided that he would let it go very far.

“Given your gift I would suggest we move this to the kitchen," Hannibal said. Will could feel his urgency to open the cooler.

“Sure," Will said a little breathlessly and added: “May I sous-chef?”

Hannibal’s eyes met his again.

“It would be a pleasure.”

He led Will through the house to the kitchen and Will felt his homesickness getting stronger. The kitchen was pristine. He wanted to sit down beside the fridge, where he had sat for long hours after Abigail’s death. His memories and the present were disorientingly different. He had to get a grip on this and remain firmly in the here and now.

Will concentrated on Hannibal who had placed the cooler at the counter and had begun to open it. A pleased smile appeared on his face when he saw what was inside.

“They are beautiful, Will,” he said gazing into the cooler.

“I hope they aren’t too much of a challenge?” Will asked, knowing they weren’t.

“No," Hannibal simply said without looking away from the fish.

He really likes them, Will thought, and then he had the pleasure of watching Hannibal take off his suit jacket and roll up his sleeves. Hannibal caught him watching and the corner of his mouth curled. Will felt his cheeks heat up, but he didn’t look away. He was here on a date; he was allowed to watch.

“How can I help?” he asked and mirrored Hannibal’s actions by taking off his own suit jacket and rolling up his shirt sleeves.

“Did you fish them this morning?” Hannibal asked.

“Yes.”

Hannibal looked at him with calculation. “And you fish regularly?”

“Yes, I’m a fisherman.”

“Then I would ask you to gut and scale them while I prepare the other ingredients.”

Will nodded, thinking that of course Hannibal would give him the task that made sure he got messy with intestines. But he probably owed Hannibal for having deprived him of a first meal with human meat.

Hannibal provided the knives for Will to work with and soon he was absorbed in his task. He

would have preferred to watch his host work, but he felt Hannibal's eyes on him every few moments and that was a treat too. Otherwise, Hannibal seemed to move around a lot. Working his usual magic. He asked Will questions about fishing, and somehow Will found himself telling him about it, his dogs, and his house without having planned to.

Hannibal had always been a good listener, and this time he didn't poke as much as he had done as Will's psychiatrist. That made the conversation easier and at the same time more difficult. Hannibal's poking had made Will open up, and now he had to do it by himself. It was a bit exhausting, and Hannibal caught on to it.

"Would you like to take a break and sit down in the living room?" he asked gently. The offer made Will feel warm inside.

He reminded himself that Hannibal was like a cat playing with its food. He was just giving Will a false sense of security before he would dig his claws in.

"Maybe I could stay and watch you?" he offered as a compromise. Hannibal pointed him to the armchair in the corner, and Will sat down with some relief and a glass of wine in his hand. He didn't expect Hannibal to let him be silent for long, but he was determined to enjoy the break as long as it would last.

He watched Hannibal and sipped his wine, remembering how Hannibal had taught him the way to hold the glass and how to taste and savor the wine merely by providing the perfect example over and over again. Will had always learned best by imitating others. Or better, becoming others.

"I'm writing a book on cannibalism," he said and surprised himself with his statement. Hannibal's attention was abruptly focused completely on Will, the food forgotten and Will could swear he saw his nostrils flare.

"That is an unusual comment considering we are preparing a meal."

Will nearly laughed at the hypocrisy and made himself go back to the role he was playing. Awkward Will didn't know about the cannibalism, but he just made an inappropriate comment and had to explain it.

"Yeah," he confirmed and remembered their first meeting. "Sorry about that, my thoughts are often not tasty."

"You associate the kitchen with the topic of your book?" Hannibal asked and went back to cutting carrots into thin strips. But now more of his attention was on Will, his eyes kept wandering in his direction.

"I have a very vivid imagination, and associations come quickly. But it's not so much about cooking… the book I mean."

Hannibal smiled slightly.

“Cannibalism without cooking," Hannibal said and shook his head. “I’m not sure if that makes the topic more or less tasteful.”

“Many cannibals don’t bother to put much sophistication into the preparation of their meal.”

“Which seems to be absurd, as they go to great lengths to procure their ingredients.”

“Exactly," Will said, nodding. He could feel that Hannibal was greatly enjoying the conversation. “You risk losing your freedom and then you overcook your prize.”

Hannibal made a nearly inaudible scoff.

“Would you like to hear my outline of the book?” Will asked.

“I would be delighted," Hannibal answered.

Will went through the chapters and explained his dual perspective of empathy and analysis. Hannibal was very eager to discuss the topic while at the same time being very careful not to show it. He behaved exactly as expected - Will was thrilled by the feeling, as it was exciting to have the upper hand with Hannibal. But he probably shouldn’t get used to it. This was Hannibal after all.

They ate in the dining room, and it was no surprise either that Will found the food exceptionally good.

“I see that I have to provide a better challenge the next time,” he said after finishing the main course.

Hannibal looked up in surprise and also some slight outrage.

Will smiled like he didn’t see it. He looked purposefully into Hannibal’s eyes and said: “Because this was delicious and that must mean it was too easy.”

An open smile broke out of Hannibal’s face.

“I wouldn’t mind another challenge,” Hannibal said. “But I believe the next time is my turn to provide the meat.”

Will confirmed with a short nod.

“I’m tempted to offer the use of my kitchen, but now that I have seen yours I’m aware that my kitchen is a hovel compared to yours.”

“That could be a challenge too,” Hannibal said suggestively, and Will had to drop the eye contact because he was so very eager and Will hadn’t expected it. He had expected a similar fight between them as the first time around. But of course, he had been the one with the defenses.

“May I help with the dishes?” he asked instead of reacting to the suggestion of Hannibal visiting his home.

“I must decline the offer,” Hannibal said and then added with a smile: “We have to eat dessert first.”

Dessert was cheesecake with raspberries, and while Will didn’t have a sweet tooth, he would have considered eating a second piece had he not just eaten a full meal.

Hannibal let him help with the dishes afterwards and they spoke about small things like how long it would take Will to get home and if he wanted to take some of the cheesecake with him. He did. It felt like a lingering goodbye.

Hannibal walked him silently to the door and carried a ceramic container with cheesecake in it. They stood at the front door.

“Thank you for hosting me, I enjoyed the evening,” Will said.

“The pleasure was mine for having a delightful guest.”

Will smiled, happy and sad at the same time. He knew this didn’t mean as much to Hannibal as to him, but he was still happy to have a bit of Hannibal for the moment and he wanted more. He made himself ask.

“I would like to meet again, would you?”

Hannibal smiled and Will could see the satisfaction in the miniscule expressions on his face.

You got me, Will thought and suppressed the smirk that wanted to form. *But I got you too.*

“I would very much like to prove I can cook in a smaller kitchen,” Hannibal said in a confessional tone.

“You are kind to say small instead of poor,” Will said and lifted his hand to take the ceramic container from Hannibal.

Their fingers touched, and Will wanted nothing more than to lean in and search for the closeness they had on top of the cliff. His face must have shown his yearning because Hannibal’s eyes widened slightly and then he leaned in, and their lips touched. Will was so startled that he didn’t react and Hannibal stepped back with a slight frown. The container and both their hands were still between them.

“Forgive me if I misread the situation, Will,” Hannibal said.

Will shook his head.

“You didn’t,” he hurried to say. “I was just surprised.”

They both stared and Will felt awkwardness surface. Before Hannibal could say something, he took the container and put it on a small table beside them.

“Let’s try again?” he asked hesitantly and stepped closer. “I don’t want this evening to end with confusion.”

Hannibal gave a small nod and got hold of Will’s waist with his hands, which meant Will had to lift his arms around Hannibal’s neck. It felt weirdly clinical, and Will wasn’t sure if he reflected the feeling from Hannibal or if it came from himself. *Be patient*, he reminded himself and leaned in to kiss.

It was better than the first because neither of them were surprised and Will found himself enjoying it. Hannibal had always been passionate about his cooking, or killing, but the kiss was proving Hannibal could be enthusiastic about something else too. In the back of his mind Chiyoh told him again that there were means of influence other than violence. Her voice was silenced when Hannibal pressed him against the door and Will heard himself groan at the domineering touches. For a moment, he considered the fantasy of staying the night. But he wasn’t ready for it and he also didn’t want Hannibal to have this kind of leverage over him, yet.

Will gripped Hannibal’s hair and pulled him away. Sharp eyes met his own and Will found himself smiling fondly at the little game Hannibal was playing. He pulled Hannibal closer again. Hannibal’s mouth met his jaw, and Will remembered the cliff and Hannibal nuzzling his throat as he did now. *Just the blood is missing*, Will thought, and before he could stop himself, he said with a rough voice: “You can bite me if you want.”

Hannibal froze in his arms and dread overcame Will. Had he gone too far? *Don’t show fear*, he thought. He had said something awkward, but not something that threatened Hannibal.

“Sorry,” he whispered and let go of Hannibal’s hair. He gently stroked over Hannibal’s shoulders and let his hands rest on Hannibal’s forearms.

Hannibal raised his head and studied Will’s face. His face was closed to Will and he couldn’t help but feel regretful. He wanted to see Hannibal, but it wasn’t the time to tell him that.

“I didn’t want to expose you,” he said. He shouldn’t let his knowledge and memories influence him too much.

Hannibal watched him closely. “It was…,” he said, and his eyes seemed to devour Will, “surprisingly perceptive.”

Heat pooled in Will’s stomach at the words.

“But maybe,” Hannibal said and slowly let go of Will, stepping away from him. “We wait until our next meal before I get a chance to taste you.”

Will huffed in embarrassment and smiled. He straightened up and took the container from the table.

“I look forward to it. Will you call about our next date, or should I?”

Hannibal reached for the door and opened it for Will.

“Allow me to check my appointment book tomorrow and let you know when I’m free.”

“Okay,” Will answered and then stepped out of the house.

They said their goodbyes and Will walked to his car. It felt like walking in a stream against a strong current. He didn’t want to go. He wanted to stay and drown himself in Hannibal. He sat down in his car and put on his seatbelt. He placed the container beside him on the passenger seat and then he looked back and was delighted to see that Hannibal was still standing in the door, watching him. He smiled and waved for a moment before he drove off.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

After the fall, Will woke up 9 months before he first met Hannibal and is assuming that he is time traveling.
Alana introduced Will and Hannibal after Will consulted on the Ripper's answer to Will killing Clark Ingram. They have been on a date and Will wonders if Hannibal knows he is the killer who left the Ripper a message.

Chapter Notes

English isn't my first language and this fic is the first work I have finished in many years.

I'm very grateful for every hit, kudos, comment or tweet. Writing "We Killed a Dragon Last Night" took over 12 months and it's great to hear from readers who liked it.

I’m very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17, dan_dresdner and obermietze. Thank you so much for all your help!

All remaining errors are mine.

Will started missing Hannibal about a minute after he'd left, and had his big freak out about ten minutes after that. He stopped the car in a side street and sat trembling while the events of the evening overwhelmed him.

Will leaned his arms and head against the steering wheel and tried to calm himself.

“Will?” Abigail said as he looked at the passenger seat where she was sitting in the same brown jacket he had last seen her wear in Florence before her hallucination had vanished. Her throat was scarred, but she wasn’t bleeding, and Will was so happy to see her that he nearly forgot he couldn’t touch her and tried to reach out.

She smiled sadly and moved backwards. His hand stopped, and he pulled it back.

“Are you okay?” she asked.

“I kissed Hannibal tonight,” he said and kept staring at her. She looked so real and alive.

The corners of her mouth curled as she tried to suppress a grin. “Is that a bad thing?”

Will thought about it and shook his head.

“Was it a bad kiss?” she asked with a mischievous grin.

Will rolled his eyes but shook his head again.

“It was a good kiss. I liked it,” he said and leaned back in his seat. “I told him that he could bite me if he wanted to.”

Abigail snorted.

“Did he?”

“He froze up like I had shown Jack his secret murder lair.”

“You surprised him, he will like that,” Abigail stated, and after a moment of consideration, Will had to agree with her.

“He is very easily bored,” Will said. For the moment, he was providing some entertainment for Hannibal.

But Hannibal was focused on two versions of him: Will-the-killer who knew too much about Hannibal and left him presents — He was interested enough in Will-the-killer to bring the Chesapeake Ripper back from his break — And then there was sweet FBI teacher Will, a cunning boy who was charming his way into Hannibal’s life.

Will wondered if Hannibal would make the connection between the two sooner or later. He should probably ensure he had an alibi in Hannibal’s eyes to ensure some confusion. He also wondered who Hannibal preferred. The killer or the possible lover.

“I set you free,” he told Abigail to distract himself from the chance that Hannibal might choose one side over the other. He felt some weird jealousy for himself.

Abigail looked questioningly at him.

“Your other self, the one living in this reality.... Her father killed himself before he ever killed any of the girls. This Abigail here will never be…”

He stopped and felt sadness set in. She would never be his Abigail; never be a hunter or fisher and never meet him and Hannibal.

“She will never be broken?” Abigail asked. She didn’t sound very interested in *that* Abigail.

“She will be maddeningly the same,” she added without waiting for his answer.

“That’s like something Hannibal once said to me. ‘When life becomes maddeningly polite,

think about me.’”

He looked away from her to the street and before either of them could say something his phone beeped. Will looked at it and saw a text message from Hannibal. It wasn’t a totally new experience, but it wasn’t something he was used to. Hannibal the psychiatrist hadn’t texted him more than half a dozen times in total. Mostly times and meeting places when they were working for Jack and had to coordinate their meetings.

But it seemed that Will the potential partner was someone who got text messages.

Dear Will, he wrote, and Will smiled at the formality. *You seem to have forgotten your cooler. With your permission, I shall use it to bring the ingredients for our next meal. I’m very much looking forward to meeting you again. Hannibal*

Will stroked over the screen of his phone and felt very warm and charmed, even knowing the ingredients would most likely be human, and Hannibal couldn’t tell him the next date because he had to plan his next murder first to procure the meat. And answer Will’s own message with a dead body.

Well, he couldn’t answer now, he was supposedly driving.

Will looked over to Abigail and found the passenger seat empty. She was gone, and for a moment he felt horribly lonely. He thought about his hallucination of Hannibal, but the idea of making him appear was strange now that he had the real one.

He drove home. As they had agreed, Alana was already gone when he arrived. The dogs were sleepy but happy to see him. Will placed the cheesecake in the fridge and went to bed.

Lying on his old sofa bed he felt a short moment of dread at the thought of showing Hannibal his home as a romantic and sexual partner. Hannibal hadn’t cared about his house the first time around, but after living with Molly in a house with a dedicated bedroom and a living room, he knew how small and weird his home was. It exposed his wish to hide in his own little world. And his own little world had no space for new things like Hannibal. With this on his mind, he slept fitfully, tossing and turning all night.

The next morning Alana sent him a carefully worded text asking how his “meeting” had gone. Will answered in the same careful way that it had been nice and Hannibal would call him for another date soon. Her answering silence felt smug. As Beverly didn’t bother him at all, he was sure that Alana was keeping her informed.

Later, after classes, Will drove to a furniture store and bought a new bed and a new sofa. He paid extra to get it delivered quickly. Weirdly enough it felt like a bigger decision than starting to kill people to gain Hannibal’s attention. He was pondering the feeling when he left the store. He knew that Hannibal probably wasn’t feeling a lot for him right now. Will was interesting and unusual, but he was using Will’s romantic interest to get closer to him. The real feelings would hopefully come later. Will felt like he should be at least a bit ashamed about prostituting himself like this, but he felt only impatience because he knew it would still

take a good while before Hannibal was hooked for sure.

He was getting into his car when his phone rang, and Hannibal's number showed. He took the call.

"Hi," he said a bit out of breath.

"Hello Will," Hannibal answered very calmly.

Will smiled in the car seat and answered just to have an opportunity to say his name: "Hello, Hannibal."

"I hope you are well." Hannibal said.

"Yes, and you?"

"I'm disappointed to tell you that I won't be free to cook for you until the end of next week."

Will thought that probably meant that Hannibal needed more time to organize his kill.

"I would have liked to see you sooner but sometimes you have to wait for good things," Will answered.

"In that case, may I offer a fill-in and invite you to the opera on Saturday?"

Eager, Will thought with satisfaction until the word "opera" registered. He grimaced a bit.

"That would be a tux and bow tie event, wouldn't it?" he asked Hannibal. For a moment silence answered him.

"Yes, but I believe a good suit would be acceptable."

The idea of attending the opera with Hannibal's high society circle while having to be dressed up uncomfortably was horrifying. But he would get the chance to watch Hannibal play with the sheep, and that should be a nice distraction. Will smiled as a thought occurred to him. It would give Hannibal a chance to influence him. Hannibal would like that. He had liked it when Will had dressed up for him after he had been released from the BSHCI too.

"I'm not sure any of my suits would be good enough to be honest. Could you recommend an acceptable…," he stopped himself as he wasn't sure how to end the sentence. Clothes store might cause some uproar, and he wasn't going to say tailor.

"I know exactly the right place for a situation like this," Hannibal intervened without Will having to expose himself further. He even sounded happy. "If you have some free time in the next few days to come to Baltimore in the morning, I would be delighted to accompany you."

"I have no morning classes for the rest of the week after tomorrow," Will said hurriedly.

“Perfect,” Hannibal said as quickly as Will had before. “I will make an appointment and send you the time and place when it is confirmed.”

“Thank you,” Will said.

“You are most welcome. I will text you soon.”

“Yes, please do and have a good day.”

“You too, Will. Goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

Will stayed in the parking lot of the furniture store for a long time and stared through the front window of his car at the sky. He was thinking about impossibly bright and normal futures which would never happen. Then, after the reality of loving Hannibal came back to him, he started his car and drove to his hairdresser in Wolf Trap. He got the same haircut he’d had after his incarceration. Hannibal had liked it then, it should be well received now too.

In the evening, Hannibal texted him the time and place for his “appointment.” Will made sure not to Google the name of the store. He didn’t want to know how expensive it was, and he was hopeful Hannibal wouldn’t bring him into a situation where he couldn’t afford the chosen suit. It would be rude after all.
But he had accumulated some money over the last few weeks from placing some sports bets, so he could afford to buy something expensive.

His Hannibal would have paid for it, Will thought and imagined a future after the fall. Hannibal would have bought Will a whole new wardrobe and shoes and too expensive cufflinks and watches. He would have liked to dress him up and mold Will a bit more after his own image.

He had classes the next day and Beverly asked him to come to the lab afterwards. He didn’t think there would be new evidence regarding his own crime and expected to be ambushed about Hannibal. To his surprise the whole group and Jack were there and they went over the evidence of his and Hannibal’s murders in exhausting detail.

“Freddie wrote another article about the Ripper’s admirer,” Beverly whispered while they checked the bloodwork reports.

“Is that why Jack is so riled up?” Will asked quietly back. He hadn’t checked Tattle Crime in the last couple of days. He would have to read up when he was home.

“She implied that Jack is maybe not completely at the top of his game due to some stress in his private life and maybe the FBI could do better in the investigation if he wasn’t heading it.”

Will frowned and couldn't help but look over to Zeller. The man had given out information about Will to Freddie Lounds in his old life, but he couldn't imagine him ratting Jack out to Freddie.

"How did she find out about that?" he wondered.

Beverly shrugged her shoulders. "She is good at what she does," she said.

"And how is Bella?" Will asked.

"Started chemo and Jack should probably take a bit more time off to be with her, but as far as I see it that's between the two of them, and he is as sharp as ever. Our two killers are just very good at avoiding leaving evidence."

Will nodded.

He left Quantico in the dark and was grateful his date with Hannibal was later in the morning tomorrow. Hopefully, he would get some sleep. He had to stop at a petrol station and when he came out after paying his breath stopped. There was an old pickup truck getting refueled by a man in worn out clothes. In the back of the truck was Winston. He was too thin and seemed a bit lethargic, but his fur was clean. Will made himself look away and go to his car. His heart was racing.

He remembered finding Winston after he had killed Garrett Jacob Hobbs and orphaned Abigail. He had needed to take care of someone and Winston had been there. Like he had been there for him, when he trotted after Will during his sleepwalking episode. Will had always felt like the dog was looking out for him, and in turn, he looked out for Winston.

His first impulse on seeing Winston now was to just steal him; take him out of the truck and drive off. Which was crazy, he was giving away his dogs. And Winston hadn't seemed abused when he had originally found him, just malnourished and abandoned. Will's guess had been that his former owner had died and Winston had been forgotten about by the authorities or heirs. The appearance of his owner and his truck now however painted a different picture. Will didn't think long about it, he took out his wallet and counted his money.

He went to the truck and held out his hand for Winston. The dog took a long time to sniff him but otherwise hardly reacted to him at all. In the bag of the driver's cabin, Will saw clothes and a sleeping bag and he started to reconstruct the fate of Winston's former owner.

He heard the door of the petrol station shop open. Will turned with dropped shoulders to make himself appear smaller and stood with his palms open to show that he had nothing to hide.

"You have a beautiful dog," he said when the man came closer, frowning.

The frowning lessened and the man came to a stop just a few steps from Will.

“What do you want?” he asked and Will felt pity. He wondered what he would do if he ever found himself in a situation like his.

“I want to buy your dog.”

The man blinked in surprise and looked from Will to Winston. Will could see the pride and the protest rise and let the pendulum swing.

“You lost your job and your home, and you live in your car. You try to feed him, but you have barely enough to feed yourself. I rescue strays and find good homes for them if I don’t keep them. I have $378 and 39 cents on me and I will give you all of it if you let me take your dog.”

Will wasn’t sure what he had expected, but it wasn’t seeing the man burst into tears. Behind him, Winston whimpered and lifted himself up on the railing of the truck. Will… wished he had just stolen Winston. The man hid his face in his hands and stepped around Will and beside Winston who started licking his face and the man pressed his face against Winston’s throat and stroked his head.

Will’s empathy made him painfully aware that he wasn’t very smart but very desperate and hopeless. Will felt the need to help him after empathizing with him, but he also wanted Winston.

“Do you have anywhere to go? Someone who could help?” he asked gently.

It took the man a while, and first he shook his head, but then stopped and nodded tentatively.

“My sister, but she lives in Reno,” he answered without looking at Will. He was hugging Winston and Will understood that urge. His money wouldn’t be enough to get this man to Reno. He looked at Winston and then his owner and at the truck. He had an idea, but it meant he wouldn’t get a lot of sleep.

“What’s your name?” he asked the man.

“Leroy,” he answered muffled by dog fur.

“Okay, Leroy,” Will said. “I have an idea. We will both get in our cars and you will follow me home. You can meet my dogs and see for yourself that I’m looking after them. You can use my shower and have a warm meal. And in the morning, if you want to, I will buy your dog and your car and get a bus ticket to Reno for you.”

Leroy looked up, skeptical. He probably thought there was a catch.

“Why would you do that?” he asked, wary.

Will shrugged. “I like your dog, and I can see that you love him and want to do right by him. So, I will help you.”

Leroy still hesitated, and Will took his wallet out and pulled his FBI ID from it.

“My work ID,” he said and held it out for Leroy. “Maybe take a picture and sent it to your sister? So she knows with whom you are.”

It took Leroy a moment until he understood and then he snapped the ID card off Will’s hand. Will could see him relax when he realized Will worked for the FBI. Things went well afterwards. Leroy took a picture with his phone, Will took back his ID, and after Leroy spent some time on his phone, he followed Will home. In consideration of Winston sitting unprotected in the truck bed, Will drove slowly.

When they reached the house in Wolf Trap Leroy parked the truck a good distance away from Will’s car. He left his car and Will thought that he looked very nervous. Will opened his house door, and Buster, Marvin, and Larry greeted him enthusiastically. He let them out for a pee and kept close to them so that he could call them back if they showed too much interest in their visitors.

Will really having dogs seemed to calm Leroy a bit and he came closer with Winston trotting behind him. Will’s dogs went to him and greeted him. Will smiled as he saw them together.

“Let’s feed the dogs and ourselves,” Will said and turned back to the house.

“They are really happy to see you,” Leroy said and followed Will in the house.
Will smiled and waved him into the kitchen.

“They must be really hungry. I’m normally only away for a half day when I teach but I did some unplanned consulting today, and the neighbor who looks after them couldn’t come on such short notice.”

He fed the dogs first. Winston got a smaller portion. Will was sure he wasn’t used to big portions.

“You make the food yourself?” Leroy asked. Will nodded and watched as something in Leroy’s face got decisive. “His name is Freddy.”

Will froze at the name and was very happy that Winston hadn’t had a nametag when he had found him.

“He seems like a good dog,” Will said instead of reacting to the name.

“He is,” Leroy hurried to say. “He is really well behaved and loyal.”

Will brought out ingredients for sandwiches and put them on the table.

“Help yourself,” he said. “I will get changed.”

Will had already eaten with the team at the BAU, and he thought that Leroy would relax

more easily when he could eat without Will watching. He changed into jogging pants and a long shirt and got a sleeping pad and a heater from upstairs.

When he came back into the kitchen, Leroy had really stuffed himself, and it made Will flinch in sympathy. He remembered being poor and missing several meals in a row because there wasn't any money to buy food.

"I don't have a sofa, but I've got a sleeping pad and a heater for my workshop in the barn. I have a spare dog bed too."

Leroy looked at him like he was a saint.

"Thank you," he said with a rough voice.

Will made himself smile. He felt uncomfortable with having someone in his space, but he could live with being uncomfortable for a day if he got Winston out of it.

Leroy showered, and Will ate the last piece of the cheesecake Hannibal had given him in the meantime. Winston was a bit livelier after some food and allowed Will to stroke his head for a few minutes. It made Will feel really teary. He wasn't sure if it came from his own feelings for Winston or from Leroy's.

It was difficult to let the dog go into the barn with Leroy, but Will felt soothed that it would be warm with the heater and he had a dog bed.

Will had trouble falling asleep. He kept thinking about Winston and about meeting Hannibal the next day and about Leroy hopefully accepting his offer. When he woke up it was still dark, and after a while, he gave up trying to go back to sleep and got up. He let out the dogs and made breakfast for his guests, himself, and his little pack. Leroy showed up very soon after Will had finished his breakfast and again he ate a lot. He told Will that he would like to sell him his car if he really wanted it and that he thought 'Freddy' would like it here a lot. Will was relieved.

He hurried the proceedings up as much as he could. They wrote down a brief contract for the sale of the truck, and Leroy turned over the registration. Will booked the bus ticket online and ordered a taxi to collect Leroy from his house to drive him to the nearest bus station. He could have done it himself, but he wanted to spend some more time with Winston and make sure he was okay with the other dogs before he left to meet Hannibal.

Will avoided watching the goodbye between Winston and his former owner when the taxi arrived. He spoke with the driver instead and paid him in advance. Leroy and Will shook hands, and then he was gone, and Winston was his again. It felt surreal.

"Hey, Winston," he said as they were all back in the house. Will kneeled down. Winston looked a bit shy but came closer when Buster and Larry used the opportunity to get some cuddles.

“I will look after you now, and maybe you look after me again, hmm? Don’t worry,” he added. “I don’t expect you to protect me from the monsters.”

He played with the dogs for a while and couldn’t resist taking a few pictures of Winston. He sent one to Alana and titled it with “Ooops.”

She called 10 minutes later.

“You are incurable.”

“Yeah,” he agreed.

“What’s his name?”

Will grimaced as he remembered it was Freddy. “I will call him Winston. Buster, Marvin, and Larry like him so far, but he’s only been here since yesterday evening. Fingers crossed it stays this way.”

“You have no classes today, do you?” Alana asked. “Then you can stay and get them to play along.”

“Actually, I can’t,” Will confessed. “I’m meeting Hannibal in a few hours.”

Alana was silent for a moment. “I thought your next meeting was in a week?” she asked hesitantly.

“He… uhh… called and invited me to the opera and as I don’t have a suit that’s good enough, we are meeting to get one for me.” He rushed the words out and could hear the embarrassment in them. It came from his old self, the one that had kissed Alana and got rejected in favor of Hannibal.

“The opera…” he heard Alana say. She knew Hannibal well enough to know how serious Hannibal took outings like the opera and Will’s embarrassment changed to smugness as he realized Alana had to conclude that Hannibal was seriously courting Will.

“You two are really getting along,” she mused.

Will shrugged and knowing she couldn’t see it, added: “I think he finds me interesting and would like to analyze me.”

“And you don’t mind that?”

Will decided for a bit of crudeness at that. After all, Alana was analyzing him too; she was just more open about it.

“Well, if my kind of crazy turns him on, I won’t stop him from trying to get me.”

Alana laughed, shocked and Will grinned.

“Then I better not keep you from preparing for your date,” she said. “And I have a patient in a few minutes. Let me know how it went, yes?”

“I will think about it,” he said teasingly.

After some consideration, Will styled his hair a bit and trimmed his beard. He dressed in one of his better pairs of trousers and a good pullover which was a bit threadbare but still comfortable.

He stayed calm during the drive to Baltimore. When he arrived, he found a very high class tailor. He stared at the shop not too surprised but definitely annoyed. Hannibal thought Will didn’t have this kind of money. So, he wanted to use this somehow to manipulate Will. Fuming, he stood in front of the shop and waited for Hannibal. When the Bentley drove up and parked, Will couldn’t help but stare irritatedly at Hannibal. It didn’t help Will’s temper that Hannibal looked meticulous.

“Hello Will,” Hannibal said with a friendly smile.

“Hello Hannibal,” Will answered and stepped back as Hannibal stepped closer, leaning into Will, expecting a kiss. Hannibal raised his eyebrows.

“My apologies,” he said and sounded confused.

Fucker, Will thought.

“Let me be clear,” Will said. “I know you have a good idea of how much a teacher for the FBI makes. And we both know it isn’t enough to afford shopping here. So, I’m wondering what your plan is.”

Hannibal looked amused, which was better than offended.

“I plan to spoil you,” Hannibal said carefully. “And pay for the suit. As you said, it’s me that’s taking you out for an event you wouldn’t normally attend, so I see it as my responsibility to pay for your attire.”

Will looked him directly in the eyes and considered this.

“I grew up poor,” he said and added “Hannibal” because he didn’t want it to sound like a patient telling his psychiatrist. “You wanting to buy something expensive for me goes against my nature.”

Hannibal pretended to be chastised.

“Again, my apologies. Maybe it is more acceptable when I tell you it won’t be a completely new suit but alterations on an existing one? It wasn’t my intention to embarrass you.”

But of course it was, Will saw it clearly. He wanted to poke Will, to see how he would react.

Will smiled as warmly and invitingly as he could while watching Hannibal's eyes, and answered him.

"You may pay for the suit, but I won't take it home. You will keep it at your place, and I will get dressed at your house. And after the opera I will get undressed at your house and return it to you."

Will decided that Hannibal's reaction was worth the embarrassment of saying those words out loud. Hannibal's eyes widened slightly in surprise. He opened his mouth and Will couldn't stop himself. He gripped Hannibal's coat and pulled him in for the delayed kiss.

It was wet and open and messy. Hannibal probably hated and loved it at the same time. Hate for the open exposure and show of passion and love for getting Will to be uncivilized. When they let go of each other both were breathless and pink-cheeked.

Hannibal gripped Will's face with both hands. "You keep surprising me," he stated.

"You need some surprises in your life," Will answered and leaned into the touch. "Otherwise it gets boring."

Hannibal nodded with a smile and let go of him. Will sighed at the loss of contact.

They went into the shop, and it wasn't as pretentious inside as Will had feared. Hannibal was greeted like a well-known and good customer, and it only took a few minutes until Will was standing in his underwear on a pedestal getting measured. To his surprise, Hannibal wasn't watching him. Will was sure Hannibal wanted to, but looking at the old-fashioned interior and the also old fashioned looking tailor, Will got why he wasn't.

You couldn't offend the locals if you wanted to come back.

It was a tedious procedure and boring and not sexy in any way. Will hated that strangers touched him and after a while, Will wished Hannibal had found a way to peek in because that would have provided a distraction.

After the measurements had been taken, he had to put on a suit which was waiting for him. It was dark grey with some dark blue and very fine stripes. It already fitted him better than any suit Will had ever worn but the tailor was still putting needles in it and making markings with chalk.

Will watched himself in the mirror while they worked on him and realized the blue in the suit matched his eyes perfectly. They had given him a shirt too but there was no tie, he asked the tailor about it. Dr. Lecter would provide the tie, he was told. Will frowned slightly and wondered if Hannibal planned to "forget" it. Without a tie Will would look like a rent boy in a paid for suit. He tilted his head and imagined the scene.

He saw himself being nervous and embarrassed and hating every moment of the opera and the company of the other attendees. He was hanging on Hannibal's arm and was concentrating on his host to avoid unnecessarily exposing himself to the other people's judging looks. Will grimaced and pulled himself out of the construction.

Before he left the measuring room, he straightened himself up as much as he was able to. He felt twitchy, sweaty and uncomfortable and wanted to go home. He had forgotten how tiring it could be to deal with Hannibal's machinations. Not that it wasn't worth it, but it was tiring nonetheless.

When they left the shop, Hannibal lead him to the Bentley.

"I have my own car," Will said but didn't stop Hannibal.

"I thought I might drive us to a restaurant and we eat something?" Hannibal suggested.

Will felt like Hannibal was hiding something behind the invitation, but he was rattled enough from getting his crotch measured to let it go for the moment.

"You will have to drive me back later," he remarked.

Hannibal opened the door to the passenger seat and held it open for Will. "It would be my pleasure."

"Alright," Will said and gave in. He would let Hannibal lead for the time being. At least until he felt calmer.

The restaurant was as pretentious as Will had expected the tailor to be. Everything was crystal and heavy linen and solid wood. Two waiters pulled out their chairs while a third was conferring with Hannibal. Will resigned himself to the fact that Hannibal would and had to order for him because he was really sure he wouldn't know any of the items on the menu.

"I hope you won't mind, but I ordered for us," Hannibal said after the waiters had left and looked conspiratorially at Will.

Will shrugged. He was actually only a little annoyed and otherwise mostly amused about the performance. Hannibal would always manipulate and control; it was part of his personality.

"I wouldn't know what to order, so I'm looking forward to what you want me to try," he answered and smiled tiredly.

Before Hannibal could speak again, the waiter arrived and brought wine. When it had been tasted and served, Hannibal raised his glass.

"To surprises," he suggested, and Will nodded hesitantly.

Surprises from Hannibal, sure. They drank. It was a delicious wine.

“I hope I didn’t overwhelm you too much?” Hannibal asked and Will shrugged.

“I’m not good at socializing,” he said, feeling a vague sense of déjà-vu. It was somehow weird to explain this to Hannibal. For one, because he had already done it once. It was just that this Hannibal didn’t remember it. Also, there was his article on empathy. Hannibal had read it, understood it. Even more, it had most likely been the reason why Hannibal wanted to get to know Will at all.

“Please forgive me for asking bluntly, but did you empathize with the staff at the shop?” Hannibal fixed his eyes on Will. “You seem very tired suddenly.”

Will thought about it and shook his head.

“It’s more…,” he said. “Like a pack of hungry dogs yipping at your feet, climbing all over each other to gain your attention. When I’m around people, I keep having to put up barriers so I don’t lose myself and it can be exhausting.”

Hannibal gave a tiny nod and straightened his cutlery.

Will watched with amazement. It looked like a nervous reaction but he couldn’t identify what would make Hannibal nervous. He wondered if it was feigned. *Very likely*, he decided and it made him curious what Hannibal planned.

“I have a new dog,” he said to avoid further discussions about his mind. Hannibal wasn’t his psychiatrist, he was a love interest on a date, and you spoke about your stupid day to day business with a love interest, didn’t you? He couldn’t let Hannibal off with just discussions about cannibalism all the time. If he wanted Will, he would have to live with dogs and fishing.

Hannibal seemed to be a bit confused at the change of topic and Will couldn’t help but smile satisfied at the confusion. It was good to keep Hannibal on his toes.

“His old owner had lost his job and couldn’t care for him anymore. He was starving. It will take a while to get him to trust me and get him fattened up again.”

Like you try to do with me, Dr. Lecter, Will thought.

“You enjoy looking after your dogs,” Hannibal said.

“Yes,” Will agreed. “I trust them more than humans.”

They talked a bit more about his pack until Will decided Hannibal had suffered enough and let him change the subject to Will’s writing. Will was still relieved when the food arrived, and they concentrated on it. He ate slowly and made sure to make frequent eye contact with Hannibal when he swallowed. It felt uncomfortable to flirt so openly, but food and eating was one of the main focuses in Hannibal’s life and Will couldn’t resist connecting himself with it.

They left the restaurant and Will felt more affected by the wine than he had expected to be when Hannibal held the door to the Bentley open. The wine had tasted heavy, and Hannibal hadn't had a lot. He wondered if Hannibal wanted him drunk when he sat down in the car. It would be a good excuse to not drive off immediately, he thought. He could be persuaded to stay a bit longer and enjoy Hannibal's company.

His phone rang as Hannibal entered the car and Will frowned when he recognized Jack's ringtone. He took the call with a quick apology in Hannibal's direction.

"Will, I need you in Baltimore as soon as possible," Jack said without a greeting.

"I'm already in Baltimore," Will said with a frown. "What happened?"

"We have another Ripper victim. Where exactly are you?"

Will didn't answer, he was frozen in his seat. He wanted to look to Hannibal but didn't dare to do so.

Hot and cold flashes went through him as he realized what Hannibal's endgame for today had been.

"Will?! Will?" he heard Jack and took a breath after not breathing for a few heartbeats.

"Where do I have to go?" he asked, and Jack told him the address of a mirror crafters company.

Will swallowed.

"I have to check something, I will call you back in a moment," Will told Jack and hung up without having received a reply. He would probably regret doing it later.

Will raised his left hand to his forehead and covered his eyes. Hannibal had planned the whole day and Will felt run over by it. He had underestimated Hannibal. No one was ever safe with him, there would always be shocks and surprises.

He looked up to Hannibal and didn't try to hide his distress.

"Is everything alright?" Hannibal asked worriedly. Will felt the sudden urge to throttle or to kiss him. Maybe both at the same time.

"Jack Crawford called, he's the head of the BAU at the FBI. I do the consulting for him, and I have to go and look at a crime scene here in Baltimore," Will explained. "I better call a taxi."

Hannibal seemed to consider this.

"There certainly isn't need for a taxi. I can drive you."

“I don’t want to bother you,” Will said hesitantly, knowing very well Hannibal was very eager to accompany him.

“As I said before, you are very welcome to the use of my car. Let me drive you, please.”

He looked like Will was doing him a favor and not the other way around. Will nodded.

“Do you have the address?” Hannibal asked. Will gave Hannibal the name of the company and the address.

“I bought a mirror for my bedroom there once,” Hannibal told him, and Will could see the scene right before his eyes.

The mirror in Hannibal’s bedroom had been a custom made. Had a salesman been rude about selling a mirror for a bedroom?

“I have to call Jack back,” Will murmured and called, while Hannibal started the car.

It was a brief conversation; he just confirmed that he was on the way and that he was bringing the friend he had been with. After he ended the call, Will wondered if he should have called Hannibal something else. *Boyfriend would be really hilarious*, he thought and looked to Hannibal with a fond smile.

But he shouldn’t smile, Will reminded himself. Hannibal had just committed a murder and orchestrated the whole day just so he could take Will to a crime scene. Will already knew Hannibal would insist on waiting and driving Will back to his car later. He would frame it as the polite thing to do, and Will thought Hannibal actually owed him a ride back. After all, he had just ended their date with a murder. A murder he had meticulously planned so it would be discovered just as their date was about to end. Will wondered how Hannibal had managed the timing.

While driving, they went through the charade of Will telling Hannibal that he would take a taxi afterwards and Hannibal insisting that he would stay and wait for Will. Will accepted after a few half-hearted protests. He wondered if Hannibal could see the deception. It wasn’t likely. He was sure he wouldn’t be alive if Hannibal knew he was playing him.

“I don’t think they will let you in,” he told him when they arrived. There were some press around the scene and they had to park a good bit away.

“I will accompany you to the police line,” Hannibal told Will when they left the car. “I can wait in the car. There is always some correspondence or reading to be done. I will not be idle.”

Will avoided Hannibal’s eyes so he would look more like embarrassed old Will and walked beside Hannibal towards the building. He spotted Freddie’s hair among the crowd that was hanging around the police line and was glad that they didn’t walk too close to her.

They were pushing their way through the crowd, and when they reached the line Will hurriedly showed the local policeman his temporary badge. The man squinted at it, and Will was feeling better for having Hannibal at his back.

The officer told them to wait a moment and stepped away to get confirmation via his radio. Will watched him, frowning. A minute later Beverly came out and approached them.

“Hey, Will,” she greeted him, and her eyes wandered behind him to check out Hannibal. Will gave her a warning look, which she completely ignored.

“I told Jack we couldn’t let your doctor stand out here in the cold waiting for you,” she said and grinned a bit.

Will suppressed a groan and deliberately didn’t look at Hannibal. Hopefully, he would be charmed at Beverly’s help and not angry about the rudeness of exposing him. Will didn’t want to see Beverly sliced again.

He thought about arguing but the reporters were close and he could kind of feel Freddie getting a scent. So instead he turned to Hannibal.

“You want to come?” he asked and noticed the pleasure on Hannibal’s face which was quickly replaced by a less intensely pleased expression.

“If I’m not in the way.”

“We will put you in a room a bit off the crime scene,” Beverly piped in, and they stepped behind the line and started to walk towards the building. Will assumed introductions had to be made.

“Special Agent Beverly Katz,” Will said to Hannibal and Beverly looked back as she heard her name. “And Doctor Hannibal Lecter.”

“Nice to meet you, doctor.” She was still smiling smugly.

“Agent Katz,” Hannibal greeted her with a nod while they were walking. They reached the door and a policeman held it open for them.

Inside a normal office-building layout awaited them. There was a reception and more police and FBI. Beverly led them to one of the hallways. Normally, Will thought, he would be briefed now about how and when the body was found, but with Hannibal with them, Beverly remained silent until they stopped at a door. It opened to reveal a small office with two chaotic desks and a lonely house plant sitting on the windowsill.

“You can wait here, Doctor Lecter,” Beverly said.

Will thought the room looked way too small and boring for Hannibal and glanced at him to check his reaction. He was wearing his polite mask and even smiled a bit.

“Thank you, Agent Katz,” he said and then looked to Will. “Please do not worry about me. Take as much time as you need,” Hannibal said.

Will smiled, inwardly feeling the condescension but not showing his annoyance.

“I will be back as soon as I can,” he promised warmly.

Beverly waited until they had closed the door and started walking towards the crime scene until she remarked: “A bit too old and slick for my taste, but he is good-looking.”

“Thanks,” Will answered dryly.

He found it a bit strange that Alana and Beverly were so excited about him dating. Apart from his awkward romance with Alana, neither woman had shown any interest in his love life in the old timeline. Maybe it was because he was dating a man.

“What exactly did you tell Jack about ‘my doctor’?” he asked.

“Don’t worry; I just told him if someone is driving you we shouldn’t let that driver stew outside with the press.”

They reached a big door and put on the shoe protection and gloves. Beverly took the handle and turned to him.

“Ready?” she asked, and Will sighed but nodded. He was never really ready for a crime scene from Hannibal. But the door was opening, and Will stepped into the room after Beverly.

It was a big storage room with many shelves and mirrors everywhere. One very big one had been placed on the ground, and the body was lying on it.
“Does Freddie have pictures of this?” he asked.

Beverly went silent. “Yes. She was, as before, tipped off and came and took pictures.”

“What’s his background?”

“He’s a handyman and makes deliveries,” Beverly said.

Will saw Jack coming closer and looked at Beverly for a moment longer to avoid Jack’s influence.

“He was supposed to make a delivery this morning but never showed up. Someone called the store’s customer helpline trying to track the shipment, and the rep called the store manager. It was after hours before anyone thought to check back here. Got here the same time Freddie Lounds did to hear her tell it. Before the boss could decide what to do, Freddie swindled her way inside and took an array of pictures.”

Beverly scoffed, “Looks like they called us just as she posted her latest scoop.”

Jack stopped beside them and gave Will a short greeting. Having overheard Beverly's narrative, Jack took over.

"At least Lounds was smart enough to tell the owners they shouldn't contaminate the crime scene and keep everyone out. She managed to get some background on the victim. She had an article online while the police were still busy securing the scene."

Will nodded without looking at either of them. When Jack had finished, Will started walking towards the body to get a closer look. He was aware of Jack clearing the room behind him.

"Take your time," he heard Jack say after a few moments. "Call us when you are ready."

Will just nodded and then heard the door close. He was alone with Hannibal's art.

Will took his time to reconstruct the murder. The victim hadn't suffered a lot. Hannibal had killed him quickly and mercifully compared to other kills of his. He looked a bit like Will, and he was very much dressed like Will when he was fishing: jeans and a plaid shirt with a fishing vest over it. The only mutilation were the eyeballs; it looked like they had been cut out while he was still alive.

The whole reconstruction made Will feel weirdly flattered. This kill seemed to be for him and him alone. Him, Will Graham the FBI teacher, not Will-the-killer courting the Chesapeake Ripper. For his killer self it was worse than a rebuke because Hannibal had completely ignored him in favor of courting Will in his role as a profiler. In a rush of excitement, Will realized Hannibal wanted to get the killer to go after Will. And it meant he didn't know Will was killing people to gain his attention. He was really fooling Hannibal, at least for the moment. The thought was empowering.

Will went to the door and sat down beside it. He wasn't sure how he should play this, and while Jack had said to take his time, he was sure he didn't have forever. In a fit of nostalgia, he felt the urge to speak with Hannibal about the murder to clear his head. Will leaned his head against the wall and pulled his knees to his body, hugging them close to his chest.

"He is not your Hannibal," he whispered to himself. "You haven't changed him yet."

And right now, this Hannibal had decided to send a killer after him. Will sighed. He had an idea how to handle this, but it would make him vulnerable in front of his colleagues and friends, and he didn't like that. Will sighed again and walked into the stream. He stayed there with the stag watching him from the shore. From afar Will was aware that Jack and Beverly came back into the room and tried to talk to him, but he made sure not to react and walked further down the river. He let the stream be a barrier between himself and the outside world until he heard who he wanted.

"Will, Will?" he heard Hannibal call him. Sure and warm hands took hold of his face.

"He's been like this for at least twenty minutes," Beverly told Hannibal in the background.

“He is blinking but not responding.“

In the stream, Will looked at the stag on the shore; it pranced from side to side.

“Showing off?” he asked it with an amused smile. From the outside world, he felt Hannibal’s hand gliding possessively over Will’s arms. He loosened Will’s arms from his legs and started to arrange his body. Will started to walk closer to the shore when his body was being moved. He reached the shore, the stag bent down and Will gripped the stag’s mane to get out of the water.

He blinked and orientated himself in the reality. Hannibal was crouching beside him and was holding his hands.

“Hello, Will,” Hannibal said very calmly with a controlled smile. “Where did you go?”

Will smiled back and blinked slowly. Beverly was standing beside them and seemed relieved that he was reacting.

“Fishing,” he said groggily and added to play up his confusion: “He killed me.”

He looked around Hannibal to the body and saw Jack look at them with a frown. Will felt as embarrassed as he had expected and stopped himself from hiding his face in Hannibal’s shoulder.

Will realized neither Jack nor Beverly had seen the similarities as they hadn’t seen him at home. Neither had Hannibal but he might have broken into Will’s home, or he had deduced Will’s fishing clothes.

“The dead man does look a bit like you,” Hannibal said and squeezed Will’s hands. “Did it… scare you?”

Will shook his head. “The mirrors represent my empathy,” he told them and made himself look back to Jack, who was now looking at the body. Beverly walked over to him to take a look too.

“He took my eyes,” he continued drowsily. “So that I can’t see him anymore. He has seen me. He knows I fish, knows how I dress when I fish. He read my article about empathy. The Ripper knows I’m working on his case and I…”

Will took a deep breath and said: “I interest him. More than the killer that’s courting him.”

“You think he is warning you off the case?” Jack asked.

Will slowly shook his head.

“No, I think he wants…,” Will squeezed Hannibal’s hands back. “The Ripper wants his admirer to see this and to realize that he is more interested in me.”

Will looked away from Jack and to Hannibal. He was still crouching beside him, and he was watching Will very intently. Will scrambled to his feet with Hannibal's help and felt weirdly pleased that Hannibal didn't let go of Will's hands when they were both standing.

"Thanks for… helping me," Will said to Hannibal. "And sorry for pulling you into this."

Hannibal smiled. "I don't mind accompanying you."

You brilliant, evil man, Will thought and stepped closer to Hannibal, giving into the urge to lean against him. Jack cleared his throat and Will looked to him.

He is mine, Will thought looking at Jack. *You won't get him this time.*

"Can you tell me anything else?" Jack asked, and Will shrugged his shoulders.

"It's the Ripper," he said leaning against Hannibal. "He is an intelligent psychopath, well socialized, well educated, most likely a surgeon and a sadist. His art makes them into something better than when they were alive. He takes his trophies, and you know what I think about that, I think he eats them like he would eat from livestock, his victims are like animals for him."

Will didn't dare to look at Hannibal while speaking but he hoped he was pleased. *I see you*, Will thought.

"Why do you think he is interested in you, Will?" Jack asked, curious.

"I'm not sure," Will answered and sighed. "Let me think about it."

Jack nodded, and his eyes moved to Hannibal's face.

"Doctor Lecter, thank you for your help," he said. "I will need you to sign a confidentiality agreement for what you have heard and seen."

Will looked at Hannibal's face and saw him nod sharply.

"Of course, Agent Crawford.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

After the fall, Will woke up 9 months before he first met Hannibal and is assuming that he is time traveling.
Will and Hannibal are now in a romantic relationship, but Hannibal doesn't know about Will's extracurricular activities as a killer and also tried to pitch Will's killer alter ego against Will the FBI consultant.

Chapter Notes

I GOT AMAZING FANART!!! If you have a tumblr account, go and tell Carrioncrowned it's awesome!
The Stargazer by Carrioncrowned

English isn't my first language and this fic is the first work I have finished in many years.

Every hit, kudos, comment or tweet or tumblr post are wonderful for me and I'm very grateful! Writing "We Killed a Dragon Last Night" took over 12 months and it's great to hear from readers who liked it.

I'm very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17, dan_dresdner and obermietze. Thank you so much for all your help!

All remaining errors are mine.

They left the room a few minutes later. Outside Will let go of Hannibal but stayed close. Hannibal went to pick up his coat up from the office he was supposed to have waited in, and Will joined him, closing the door behind them and leaning against it as Hannibal put on his coat and scarf.

"This doesn't bother you much, does it?" he said. He knew why, of course, but the Will he was playing didn't, and this was a good time to ask.

"The body doesn't bother me because I worked as an emergency surgeon," Hannibal answered the underlying question in Will's words.

"And my catatonic state doesn't bother you because you are a psychiatrist?" Will asked.

Hannibal looked at him with a curious expression.

“Are you worried that I see you like a patient, Will?”

Will looked to the side.

“Maybe?” he said. “I know you are curious on a professional level. I know the main reason you agreed to meet me the first time was curiosity.“

For a moment, Hannibal was silent.

“Should I apologize?” Hannibal asked after openly considering Wills words. Will couldn’t help it, he smiled. Hannibal wishing to charm was very appealing.

“We are both observers,” Will replied, rephrasing Hannibal’s words from his old timeline. “Neither of us can shut that off. Let’s just be honest about it. My mind interests you, that’s fine. You don’t behave like I’m your patient. If you feel the need to poke my brain, let me know.”

“Would you let me?” Hannibal asked surprised.

“Poke my brain?” Will asked and Hannibal gave a short nod. Will looked to the window and not at Hannibal.

“It would be like the biting for you, wouldn’t it?” Will asked, flushing slightly.

He knew what turned Hannibal on, but telling him felt weird.

He had been frank about what he wanted with Molly, but Molly hadn’t been a cannibalistic serial killer.

“You offered to let me bite you,” Hannibal answered very calmly. Will looked back to him over the frame of his glasses. Hannibal looked intrigued, a good sign.

“Yes,” Will said and cleared his throat.

“Would you like it?” Hannibal asked.

“I…,” Will swallowed down all doubts and the memories of Hannibal ripping out the dragon’s throat with his teeth, which was exciting on a different level. ”Yes, I think I would. But I’m not sure about you psychoanalyzing me, to be honest. I want you to know me intimately, but I’m not willing to accept an uneven relationship between us.”

“I understand,” Hannibal answered and stepped closer to Will and the door. “And I agree that we need to have a relationship of equals. Maybe we can make it an exchange.”

“I bite you, and you bite me?” Will asked jokingly and Hannibal smirked.

“If you wish,” he answered and placed his hands beside Will’s head. “But I thought more about you poking my brain and I poking yours in return.”

“Quid pro quo?” Will asked. “That would be fair.”

They smiled at each other and Hannibal leaned forward to press his lips against Will’s throat. Will shuddered, and his mind darkened his surroundings and let the moon shine above them like it had been when they killed the dragon.

He expected Hannibal to bite, but he just nuzzled his neck, throat, and hairline.

Shivering, Will made himself be rational. They weren’t on top of the cliff.

“It would make me look very weird in the eyes of the press if I came back with bite marks from a crime scene.”

“Hmm,” Hannibal hummed and Will felt his breath and wanted to press himself against Hannibal. “A visit to the opera shouldn’t be accompanied by bite marks either.”

“You will have to bring dressing material with you when you come to me to cook then,” Will decided.

To his surprise, Hannibal reacted by pressing himself against Will’s body. Will couldn’t help but groan at the contact; he wanted to rub himself against Hannibal. He hugged Hannibal’s waist and pressed his face against the soft skin on Hannibal’s throat. Will hadn’t expected such a strong reaction.

They didn’t do anything else, and still Will felt on the edge of serious arousal. He took deep and even breaths to calm himself and felt Hannibal’s pulse against his lips. It was faster than it should be.

They let go of each other after a while and left the room in tense but comfortable silence. On the way to the car, some of the press took pictures, and Will was sure another ‘It takes one to get one’ article was in his future when he saw Freddie Lounds’ interested look.

“Can we just drive away quickly?” he asked Hannibal when they were sitting in the car. It earned him a quizzical look.

“I hate the press,” Will said as an explanation. “and I’m pretty sure someone will put me in the spotlight. Dig up my article, and whatever gossip from the FBI they can get, and put together some annoying story about my involvement.”

He realized he didn’t know how Hannibal’s involvement would be portrayed in this scenario.

“I hope nobody recognized you.”

“I don’t mind being connected to you, however public,” Hannibal told him.

Will snickered. “I bet you wouldn’t mind us being in the society pages.”

Hannibal looked over at Will for a moment before concentrating on driving again.

“No,” he confirmed. “I wouldn’t.”

Arriving back at Will’s car, Hannibal pulled over, and Will hesitated for a moment before leaning in to kiss him. It was a gentle kiss and lasted only for a few moments. Will was sad when it ended.

“You look unhappy,” Hannibal said, regarding Will’s face as they separated.

“I don’t want to leave,” Will confessed with an embarrassed smile.

Hannibal raised his hand and stroked Will’s cheek. “I would prefer that you stay as well, but I do have some evening appointments to attend to.”

”And my dogs will miss me,” Will added.

“It seems, we both have responsibilities,” Hannibal observed. “But we will be meeting again very soon.”

Will smiled and nodded.

It was hard to leave and drive home. He wondered if Hannibal would be angry with him when he found out he had been playing him. Hannibal had been angry in the past when Will had betrayed him to catch the Ripper, but playing him now might actually impress him. Still, Will decided he would take precautions to avoid another gutting.

He got up early the next morning and took Winston to his veterinarian for a check-up. Unsurprisingly, the dog was a bit too thin but otherwise healthy. When the doctor asked about his other dogs, he told her he was reducing his pack. The doctor promised she would let him know if someone was looking for a dog.

Will drove Winston home before heading to Quantico. As soon as he arrived, Jack started grilling him about the case. Although Jack hadn’t said much the night before, after realizing the victim was dressed as Will, he was now insistent that the Admirer could go after him. Will declined a protection detail but agreed on getting a gun from the armory and a concealed weapons permit.

“About Doctor Lecter…” Jack started after that delightful conversation and Will raised his right hand to stop him. “If your question has anything to do with my private life, don’t, okay?”

Jack blinked and Will felt some satisfaction. Jack nodded, and Will had to control his face very tightly to not show his surprise of Jack giving in.

Afterwards, he asked Beverly if she would go shooting with him sometime and she quizzed him about Hannibal. Zeller and Price jumped in. It was just friendly ribbing, but still a bit annoying. They all seemed surprised that he was with Hannibal. Will wasn't sure if it was to do with Hannibal's gender or his class, but they were all very nice about it and their teasing was very gentle.

He left them with a more detailed profile of the Ripper and a weirdly warm feeling in his chest. They had been his friends in his old life but in a distant way. He still didn't want to go out with them every Friday, still abhorred the very idea, but it was nice to know there were some people in his life who… knew and liked him, and accepted that he needed his space and distance.

On the day of his date, Will woke up with a slight fever and a headache. He took some aspirin and started to feel better around lunch time. He wondered if this was the beginnings of his encephalitis, though it was months too early for the illness to present. There was even a chance he wouldn't get it this time. Ultimately his doctors had never found out what had caused it.

On his way to see Hannibal, he wondered what kind of abuse Hannibal would heap onto a lover with encephalitis. He knew he had been the perfect specimen for Hannibal's experiment and it was possible this time's Hannibal would also make him go through hell to understand his gift better.

The knowledge made him twitchy and uncomfortable when he arrived at Hannibal's door. When Hannibal let him in, he took one look at Will and embraced him. Will swallowed nervously and leaned into the embrace.

It's manipulation, he reminded himself, but the memory of their embrace at the cliff top let him push the thought aside to just enjoy the touch for a moment.

"Hello Will," Hannibal said into Will's shoulder.

"Hello," Will replied, holding his monster.

"You are distressed," Hannibal stated and Will smiled.

"Yes, I'm sorry. Sometimes my imagination doesn't give me a rest."

Hannibal took a step back while still holding Will and looked at his face.

"Is our plan for the evening stressing you?"

Still caught in the memories of his body giving out on him, Will had to stop for a moment to consider what Hannibal might think was stressing him.

"No," he said and smiled. "It's the cases. Jack sends me to dark places, and it feels like my

imagination is bringing more and more of that darkness into my own world."

Hannibal had often told him his work for Jack was bad for him in the old timeline, this should be a treat for this Hannibal.

"And the idea of going out with me is not stressing you?" Hannibal asked, and Will saw the amusement shimmer in his eyes.

Will scoffed and rolled his eyes. "I had successfully suppressed all horror scenarios about it until now."

Hannibal smiled and leaned in to kiss Will, who found himself very quickly moved against the door again. His mouth got devoured. Not having the strength to put up barriers against Hannibal right now, Will went pliant and soft in his arms and closed his eyes.

Hannibal's hands explored Will's upper body, stroking his arms and his flanks. He kissed hungrily, almost feverishly and Will groaned into his mouth when Hannibal's right hand gripped his left leg, pulling it around his waist. His thigh pressed against Will's growing erection when he ended the kiss, and he looked at Will with satisfaction.

"An orgasm would help you relax." It hadn't been a question but Hannibal stilled, waiting for Will's permission.

Will could just take the initiative and rut against Hannibal until he came. For a moment, he wasn't sure why he shouldn't, but then his imagination provided him with a better idea. He wasn't sure it was his or Hannibal's.

"Swallow me down and get a taste," he said with a rough voice and watched Hannibal's eyes widen.

Will felt himself more turned on than he had thought possible and he wasn't sure if he felt Hannibal's or his own arousal.

He put his arms around Hannibal's neck and pressed an open kiss against Hannibal's ear, lightly scraping the smooth skin of the outer shell with his teeth.

"In the dining room," he whispered, "you can have me on the table."

Hannibal's muscles tightened under Will as he spoke and he hadn't even finished the last sentence when Hannibal lifted him up and carried him through the corridor.

Will wheezed in surprise at the strength behind the action and gripped Hannibal's neck tighter.

He felt another rush of heat when Hannibal placed him on the table and kissed him while his hands made short work of Will's clothes. Soon he was sitting completely naked on the wooden tabletop, moaning at the assault from Hannibal's mouth and hands. Soft kisses turned into slightly painful bites while Hannibal's hands stroked his waist and thighs. Hannibal was

licking and sucking his nipples, and Will wanted to push Hannibal down, wanted to feel his mouth.

“Please,” he begged. Hannibal seemed to understand and moved to lick his cock.

Will took a sharp breath and reared up from the table just to be pressed back down by one of Hannibal’s hands.

“Be as loud as you wish,” Hannibal whispered, and Will could feel his breath against his cock before it was engulfed in the heat of Hannibal’s mouth.

Much better than eating my brain, Will thought, panting, and brought his hands up to cover his mouth and bite into, to stop himself from grabbing Hannibal’s hair and dictating the speed.

Hannibal had wanted him to be loud, so Will didn’t censor himself and moaned and whimpered as he wanted. His shout when he came down Hannibal’s throat was loud, and he felt himself flush when he realized just how loud he’d been. He took harsh breaths while laying on the dining table and looked down at Hannibal from under half closed lids.

Hannibal hair was wild and his mouth red and swollen, but otherwise he seemed composed and looked up at Will before he swallowed.

“Do you like my taste?” Will asked with a coarse voice and received a pleased smile.

“Delicious,” Hannibal replied, and to Will’s pleasure he at least didn’t sound unaffected.

“Come here,” Will invited. “Please?”

He held out his hand and Hannibal appeared strangely vulnerable as he looked up to him, before he climbed onto the table and laid down on top of Will. The feeling of the rough tweed fabric of his suit against his naked skin was obscene and Will shuddered.

Hannibal kissed him very gently, and Will let him open his mouth with his tongue and tasted himself on Hannibal. He could feel Hannibal was still hard and was a bit disappointed that he hadn’t just lost himself as Will had.

“I want you to come too,” he said when the kiss ended, and he met Hannibal’s eyes as he looked down at him.

“Come shower with me?” he asked Hannibal. It seemed a good way to get Hannibal naked with him. “You can take advantage of how soft and pliable I am right now.”

“I don’t believe you are ever just soft and pliable,” Hannibal replied, but moved off him and helped a smiling Will off the table.

“Not just, no,” Will agreed and leaned against Hannibal. “And you wouldn’t want me like that.”

They walked out of the dining room and up the stairs to Hannibal's bedroom. Will couldn't stop himself from constantly pressing against Hannibal or holding his hand. He craved his contact so much he even held onto his sleeve when Hannibal let go of him to open the bedroom door.

He had seen pictures after he left the hospital, but he had never been in the room while it was fully furnished. It was very hedonistic and very Hannibal. *Later*, Will decided, later he wanted to see the walk-in wardrobe containing Hannibal's suits. He wanted to walk naked into it, touch every suit and put his smell on them.

Hannibal watched him with a fond smile as Will finished looking through the room. He realized he was still holding the hem of Hannibal's suit jacket. Embarrassed, he let go of it.

"Why are you still dressed?" he asked and Hannibal raised his eyebrows before he gave a curt bow, like a stage actor, and began to strip. He started with his tie. He loosened it, pulled it over his head and ruffled his hair even more in the process. Will longed to touch it. The tie fell to the ground, and Hannibal let his jacket slip over his strong, muscular shoulders. Hannibal unbuttoned his vest while he walked slowly backwards. His head was tilted and his eyes were dark, Will followed him mesmerized. The vest fell as his back connected with the bathroom door, and this time it was Will who pressed Hannibal against a door and devoured his mouth. Will knew he wouldn't get hard again so soon but he was very eager to see Hannibal come. He bit into Hannibal's lips ending the kiss and saw the heat in Hannibal's eyes when he stepped back. With a mischievous grin Will opened the top buttons of Hannibal's shirt and then gripped the collar.

Hannibal's eyes widened as he realized what Will intended to do and when Will heard his name spoken in a warning tone he ripped the shirt open. Hannibal snarled and Will watched him his lips parted.

"How nice your teeth are," he said grinning. "Maybe you still get to bite me today."

Hannibal floundered and Will took advantage of this moment and began to unzip Hannibal's trousers. When he tried to get his hands underneath the waistband Will was gripped by his hair and his head pulled backwards. He looked challengingly at Hannibal but didn't fight his hold. Hannibal opened the bathroom door and pushed Will through it. Will stumbled and then caught himself. When he turned around Hannibal had already taken off his trousers and was following him into the bathroom. He was a dark silhouette against the bright rectangle of the open door. Will heard a click and the lights turned on.

Hannibal took his socks and pants off very quickly. Naked, he couldn't hide the lean hunter stature he hid under his three-piece suits. Will let his gaze roam over Hannibal's body. He was glorious, but one detail was off: Hannibal's wrists were unscarred. Will found himself staring at the undamaged skin. It was disconcerting. They had been his scars, even if they had been inflicted by proxy. Will realized he missed them the same way he missed the scar on his belly.

If Hannibal noticed Will's gaze lingering on his wrists he didn't remark on it. Instead, he took

Will's hand and led him into the shower, turning it on. Unsurprisingly, the shower cabin was large and, Will thought, a bit frivolous. It had side jets embedded in the walls. The mundane task of undressing had disrupted the mood a bit and Will hugged Hannibal when he turned around in the falling water.

They moved slowly against each other, with Hannibal's erection sliding over Will's soft penis in a strange yet sensual way. Hannibal was nuzzling his neck and ears and kept pressing soft kisses against Will's face. He felt himself relax again and hummed contentedly against Hannibal's skin.

Hannibal caressed Will's shoulders and turned him around. Will pressed the palms of his hands against the tiles, arching his back. He should have seduced Hannibal the first time around, Will thought. It would have saved a lot of people pain, including himself.

Hannibal pulled him against his front and Will couldn't stop himself from moaning when his back was against Hannibal's chest. Hannibal's erection pressed into Will's cleft. Will could see himself getting fucked and he had to close his eyes for a moment and push the images out of his mind.

"Will?" Hannibal asked and Will looked back with a weak smile.

"Sorry," he said. "I got distracted by… ventures we are not undertaking today."

"If you are uncomfortable...," Hannibal began.

Will shook his head. "I really, really want you to come against me."

Hannibal seemed to hesitate, and because Will couldn't stand the thought of him backing off, he reached behind for Hannibal's hand and pulled him closer.

"There is a grey bottle on the ground to your left," Hannibal said against Will's ear. "Can you pick it up for me, please?"

Will blinked a bit at that, but the moment he tried to follow the request he knew why Hannibal had asked. Because he didn't let go of Will. He held his waist so that his cock slid between Will's cheeks as he bent down and got the small bottle. With a deep red face and some curses on his tongue, which he swallowed down, Will straightened up and handed Hannibal the bottle over his shoulder. As expected it was lubricant, and soon Hannibal's cock was nestled between Will's legs and he was fucking him rhythmically. Hannibal's right arm was around Will's waist again, and he had slung his left around Will's shoulders and throat. Will was aware how easily Hannibal could strangle him like this, and still he was half aroused. He didn't get hard but he felt hot and turned on.

Every little moan and groan from Hannibal that reached his ears made Will shudder and move back against him.

He leaned forward and kissed Hannibal's forearm and whispered. "Come all over me, mark me as yours."

A little shudder went through Hannibal at the words, and he sped up his movements and pressed Will against the cold tiles. They groaned at the same time.

Will realized it wasn't enough and that Hannibal needed another push. He leaned his head away from Hannibal's and bared his throat.

"Can't come again, but you can still make me scream," he said. After a second he felt teeth meet his shoulder and Hannibal's grip tightened. First, the bite was warm and stung sharply, and then it hurt. Will screamed when his skin broke, and he felt Hannibal come between his legs in hot spurts. Hannibal stopped and slowly released Will's neck breathing harshly.

Will was shaking and his legs were wobbly, but Hannibal was holding him up.

The following minutes were a bit vague in Will's memory. His next clear moment found him sitting on Hannibal's bed. He was enfolded in a warm and soft bath towel. Hannibal was standing naked in front of him and was cleaning his neck with something that stung.

"Are you back with me?" Hannibal asked and Will looked up to him and blinked.

"Yes," he said with a hoarse voice.

"Where did you go?" Hannibal asked as he cleaned the bite.

Will hesitated. "Inside?" He half asked. "Not a real place just in myself. It was a bit… overwhelming."

Hannibal gave a small nod and took up a bandage and placed it on Will's shoulder.

"I feel I must apologize for getting carried away," Hannibal said as he taped the bandage on. He was half kneeling now and looked with what seemed to be genuine shame at Will. Will couldn't help but be amused over the performance.

"I wanted you to get carried away," he told Hannibal and cupped his chin. "I like you uncontrolled."

Will could feel the muscles relax under his fingers as he spoke and smiled. He leaned towards Hannibal and pressed a fleeting kiss at his lips.

"Shall we get dressed?"

Will got to see the dressing room. There were a lot of suits and formal wear but also pullovers and cord trousers. Will's new suit was meticulously prepared and, much to Will's satisfaction, Hannibal had selected a tie in the color of Will's eyes to go with it. He got dressed quickly. Hannibal put on his clothing with such nonchalant poise, as if doing it in Will's presence was a familiar routine. Will watched and Hannibal noticed and smiled slightly.

They took the Bentley to the opera and Will got twitchy during the drive. He wanted to take Hannibal's hand and hold onto it, but they were driving amid heavy inner city traffic and Hannibal needed both of his hands.

"Can I just hang on your arm all evening and smile besottedly at you?" He asked when his anxiety got worse.

Hannibal looked for a short moment over to him and Will couldn't bring himself to meet his eyes.

"If you wish," he agreed, but Will knew Hannibal was disappointed at his growing display of insecurity. "But I would have liked to introduce you to some acquaintances of mine as who you are."

"FBI reject working as a teacher?"

"And consultant," Hannibal added. "Who is also a writer."

"More trying to be," Will said.

"I would say your recent article and your monograph ensure you deserve the title of writer, Will."

The corners of Will's mouth twitched.

"You read 'Time of death by insect activity'?" He hadn't told Hannibal about it but, it seemed, Hannibal had done his homework.

"I did indeed," Hannibal said. "It was a compelling read."

"I read 'Evolutionary Origins of Social Exclusion'," Will confessed. It wouldn't hurt to admit that he too had researched Hannibal. "I thought about using it for a lecture. Make them think about the broader picture for a bit."

As expected, Hannibal was flattered and Will was glad when they began to discuss something as uncomplicated as how Will could make a lecture out of Hannibal's paper, instead of analyzing his possible self-degradation as Hannibal's companion.

When they arrived at their destination and parked, Will was slightly disappointed he couldn't keep conversing with Hannibal about psychoanalysis. He had missed discussing work-related matters with him. Hannibal had always been a good sounding board.

Contrary to his earlier request, Will decided that he would try not to just hang on Hannibal's arm, as he let himself be steered into the concert hall. They had arrived a bit late, probably due to their activities before leaving the house, and it saved Will from any small talk before the performance.

The opera itself was pleasing. Will didn't really listen to a lot of music apart from the radio and the music of his teenage years, so he wasn't an expert. But Hannibal was, and it was easy to empathize with him. At some point, Will stopped watching the performers and studied Hannibal instead, who was completely captivated by it. Hannibal noticed of course and gave Will a questioning look. Will shrugged his shoulders, a bit embarrassed.

"Is it not to your liking?" Hannibal asked during the break. Will shook his head.

"I enjoy… your enjoyment," he said honestly because Hannibal might know it if he lied.

To his surprise, Hannibal accepted the answer and there was no disappointment discernable in his reaction. With Molly, his answer would have caused… not a fight, but a talk with superficial understanding, followed by pangs of guilt and doubt on his side. But Hannibal just nodded and they left to socialize.

"Introduce me as you like," Will whispered as Hannibal gave him a champagne glass.

Hannibal smiled openly and, to Will's surprise, kissed him. Will was sure that a lot of people were watching them. It was a very gentle kiss compared to the bite he had received earlier that evening.

"If only they knew," Will said quietly when Hannibal was withdrawing.

"Knew what?" Hannibal asked and Will smirked. He lifted his hand and touched the front of Hannibal's shirt.

"If they knew what's beneath your suit, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal smiled back at him. "And you know?" he asked.

Will leaned closer to Hannibal's ear and whispered: "I'm starting to see glimpses."

That obviously amused Hannibal and Will felt the thrill of having the upper hand and calmly sipped from his champagne glass as Hannibal maneuvered them through the room. Will was mostly silent and only mustered a small smile when Hannibal wasn't really interested in a person. But he made an effort to talk with the ones Hannibal seemed to find a little interesting.

"Will, may I introduce you to Jasmin Komeda?" Hannibal said at one point and watched his face very attentively.

Will frowned. The name seemed familiar, and he reached out to shake her hand.

"My friend Will Graham."

Her grip suddenly became more firm and she stepped closer with recognition on her face.

“Will Graham, who wrote the Standard Monograph on Insect Activity?” she asked and Will nodded.

“Will, Mrs. Komeda writes crime novels,” Hannibal explained and Will remembered her name then.

“The Blue Beetles of Milton Creek,” he said and she beamed. “I got an advance copy.”

“Your work greatly helped me with some details,” she said, satisfied that he had made the connection. “I thought it prudent to send you one as you are mentioned in the thanks.”

“Oh,” Will said and took a sip of champagne to hide his face. He hadn’t known, and he hadn’t read it. As if she was reading his mind, she laughed.

“Don’t worry if you haven’t read it.” She seemed to mean it.

“I haven’t,” he confessed. “I don’t really read crime novels; it’s too much like work.”

“Will works as a teacher and consultant for the FBI now,” Hannibal intervened. Will had the feeling Hannibal had known about Mrs. Komeda’s interest, and he had facilitated the meeting on purpose.

He leaned into Hannibal and linked arms with him. He slouched to appear smaller so he could look up to Hannibal. The act made Hannibal smile with amusement and Will didn’t even have to look to know Mrs. Komeda was thrilled with the picture of Hannibal doting on Will.

Will leaned forward to her and said in a conspiring tone: “Hannibal finds my work exciting. But it’s mostly showing presentations to FBI candidates and hoping they listen to me, to be honest.”

She laughed and studied Hannibal. The gong announced the intermission was over and Will wondered what she would have said if it hadn’t sounded.

They didn’t stay to talk or mingle after the show, and Will was glad for it. The evening hadn’t been bad, but it was still hard for him to stay focused with so many people around him. When they both sat in the car, Hannibal looked at him.

“Will?” He asked and Will looked back at him, feeling a bit dazed.

“Do you need help to ground yourself?” Hannibal asked and after a moment Will understood. Curious as to how Hannibal wanted to help, he nodded. He expected an exercise like the one Hannibal had taught him in the old timeline. *Your name is Will Graham*, he heard his Hannibal say in his mind.

But this Hannibal surprised him by reaching out, putting his hand over the bite on his shoulder and suddenly pressing against it with force.

Will screamed. The pain woke him up abruptly and brought him back fully to the present. He groaned and wheezed until Hannibal let go of his shoulder.

“Do you enjoy pain, Will?” Hannibal asked, curious, and Will shook his head.

“You enjoy causing pain,” he said in reply and saw Hannibal’s eyes focus sharply on him.

“And you enjoy… my enjoyment?” Hannibal deduced and Will smiled at the notion.

“To a certain extent, yes.”

“Hmm…,” Hannibal hummed and started the car.

“How much of your attraction to me is caused by my attraction to you?” Hannibal asked when they were on the way back.

For a moment, Will wondered if Hannibal would take a detour on the way and if Will would end up somewhere disguised as a tableau of the Admirer.

“I’m never really sure how much comes from me and how much from my partner,” he confessed, making himself concentrate on Hannibal’s question. “But I felt attracted to you before you were to me, so I’m sure my interest is real, if that worries you.”

It was true and also a lie. He couldn’t be absolutely sure how much his old Hannibal had influenced him. But he liked this Hannibal. A Hannibal who was capable of seriously hurting Will, but hadn’t yet apart from the little love bite and the “calming exercise” just now. Hannibal didn’t answer and Will continued.

“You are also a very controlled person with a carefully constructed external persona. When I said I see glimpses of you, I meant it. Your personality doesn’t overwhelm me as others do.”

Like the other killers do, Will thought but didn’t say.

“It’s one of the reasons I like you.” That was true in a way. Hannibal had molded and carved Will’s mind to set him free, but he was also a very easy person to be around for Will. Hannibal was able to feel deeply, but he didn’t feel as regularly as other people, and that was relaxing for Will.

“During the interlude, you could tell who I liked and who I didn’t care for,” Hannibal stated.

“Yes,” Will said with a snort. “I didn’t have to empathize with you to understand you only liked one person. Mrs. Komeda is refreshingly direct and still nice.”

“You are mistaken,” Hannibal said with a warm voice. “I liked two.”

Will smiled. “Flattery,” he called out. “And a distraction from your worries. Tell me Hannibal, are you more worried I will look through the persona you present to the world or

about my feelings being nothing but your influence."

Hannibal was silent. It surprised Will, rarely had his Hannibal not replied quickly in their verbal exchanges. He was really thinking about Will's question, Will realized.

"I admire your mind," Hannibal said. "I do not wish to unduly influence you."

Liar, Will thought and felt a hint of fear. Being mollified by Hannibal could be frightening. From Will's experience, it was like the fattening before the slaughter. But he couldn't let fear rule him.

He changed the topic. "My dog sitter came this evening and checked on the dogs. If you want I could stay the night, but I would have to leave very early."

Hannibal relaxed nearly invisibly beside Will.

"I would be delighted to have you as a guest for the night," he said.

Coming home to Hannibal's house made Will feel nostalgic. He had never lived with his Hannibal or shared his bed, but he still had memories of Hannibal driving him home or visiting him in Wolf Trap. And also a lot of memories of dining with Hannibal, or preparing food. Only living with Molly had been similarly domestic.

Hannibal gave him a new toothbrush and one of his own pajamas. Will's stature wasn't as broad as Hannibal's in the shoulders, so the top of the pajamas felt a bit loose. Will was happy that he didn't have to roll up the sleeves. Sometimes Hannibal grew in his mind and he felt small. It was nice to have physical proof Hannibal wasn't that much bigger.

Will came out of the bathroom as Hannibal went in. The bed had fresh sheets and Will took the right side of the bed. On the left bedside table was a book and on the right was his own phone. He put his glasses next to the phone and crawled under the covers. He couldn't help but compare this with his life with Molly. The bed was different and, obviously, so was the person he would be sharing it with. His mind decided this moment was perfect to remind him of all the ways this could go wrong. The door of the bathroom opened and Hannibal came out.

I love this man, Will thought to stop the tidal wave of fear in himself. He wanted to be with Hannibal, and he would handle whatever it included. Hannibal laid down beside Will. Will turned to look at him and said: "I might wake up from night terrors."

Hannibal looked calmly at him and asked: "May I suggest spooning?"

Will blinked and couldn't help but laugh uncontrollably.

"Sorry," he said, trying to calm himself followed by a snort. "That was just a bit unexpected."

Hannibal seemed amused at his antics but said nothing. He just waited for an answer.

“We can try, but I still might wake up and wake you with me.”

Hannibal reached out and cupped Will’s face.

“It would be my pleasure.”

Will leaned against the touch and smiled.

Hannibal leaned closer and gave Will a closed mouthed kiss. He then turned and placed Will’s arm over his waist. To his surprise, Will felt himself being pulled into the position of the big spoon. Will smiled wider. Rarely had he fallen asleep as fast as that night.

He dreamt of his dogs and a snow-covered Wolf Trap. In the corner of his eye, he saw the stag walk in the fields and watch him. He woke sweaty, not from a nightmare, but from his phone sounding the alarm. He turned if off. He was alone in bed and felt bereft by it. He wondered if they had spooned during the whole night or moved apart.

Feeling sluggish, Will stood up, got cleaned up and dressed. He wandered downstairs to the kitchen and found Hannibal preparing a meal: eggs and sausage. He smiled and shuddered at the same time. *Too late for uneasiness about the food*, he told himself.

“Good morning,” Will said and wandered over to Hannibal for a quick kiss.

“Good morning Will,” Hannibal replied. He looked very soft and warm in his sleepwear and mussed hair.

“I’m not sure I have time for breakfast,” Will said and looked with skepticism at the prepared food.

“It is only eggs, sausages and toast,” Hannibal said and Will leaned against him.

“And fresh orange juice and coffee and I think I smell croissants in the oven,” Will added with a smile.

Hannibal hummed noncommittally and Will chuckled. He asked if he could help carry everything to the dining room and was soon placing plates and jugs and food on the dining room table. The room smelled a bit of disinfectant and it made Will smirk. For someone who ate people, Hannibal was very fastidious.

Hannibal seemed nervous as they were eating and Will frowned. If Hannibal showed his nerves so obviously, he wanted Will to notice and ask.

“Are you alright?”

Hannibal looked up in a perfect mix of embarrassment and worry.

“I wanted to ask if Jack Crawford has given you some form of protection from the Ripper’s

admirer. From what I saw and what was displayed in the news, I believe it could set the Ripper's admirer against you."

As was your design, Will thought sarcastically and looked down to pick up some more sausage that very likely had meat from the last Ripper victim in it.

"I'm not worried about him, to be honest," he said and ate the sausage from his fork without visible hesitation.

"Why not?" Hannibal asked interested. Will considered telling him he wasn't allowed to talk about it but Hannibal had seen the scene and he was currently playing worried partner. He kind of had to ask. And he would also try to use Will's mind to find out more about the Admirer.

"You signed Jack's confidentiality agreement?" he asked and Hannibal nodded.

"The Ripper's admirer… he… hm...," Will thought about it for a moment. "I'm very sure he won't go for what the Ripper wants."

"Can you explain why you believe that?" Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged.

"Not really, but I feel very strongly that he has a specific victim profile and I don't think I fit into it."

He smiled a bit nervously and looked away from the food and Hannibal.

"That's the problem with what I do. Sometimes the evidence explains later how I know stuff, but sometimes it's just guesswork. Some jumps I make, I can't explain."

"And your jump here is that you don't fit the profile? If you are mistaken, you are in danger."

Will nodded and took a bite from his toast. He chewed and swallowed.

"Don't worry. I doubt that the Admirer is so easily manipulated by the Ripper. Until now he was very careful and left no evidence. Going after an FBI consultant because the Ripper is urging him to do so… he would look like an acolyte, and so far he has been very showy about being independent."

"And Agent Crawford agrees with you on this?" Hannibal asked.

Will snorted.

"Jack wanted to give me a protection detail and a gun. I said yes to the gun and no to the protection detail."

Hannibal seemed to ponder over this.

“Don’t worry,” Will repeated and put his hand on Hannibal’s hand. “I can look after myself.”

He got a smile as answer. It felt very sincere. Will had to remind himself that Hannibal was playing him. He had the sudden urge to follow Georgia Madchens example and try to cut open Hannibal’s face to get beneath the mask.

I want to see the real you, he thought.

“So, any hints what you will cook for us this coming weekend?”

Hannibal shook his head. “I wish to surprise you.”

Will left for Wolf Trap soon after and his mind was running over the events of the last few days. He felt muddled even after a good, if short, sleep. So many things had happened, and Will felt overwhelmed by it. He had this urge to just let Hannibal take over the show but he had seen once how that worked out and he had no desire for more time in the BSHCI or dead family members and friends. If it meant being Hannibal’s sole focus, he was absolutely willing to be that. But he wasn’t sure what Hannibal wanted yet.

He had complimented Hannibal on his controlled demeanor on the previous evening, but it made it hard to understand him.

“He is lonely,” a familiar voice slowly spoke from behind Will, and he cursed loudly and gripped the steering wheel tight. He needed to stop making up people while driving his car. A look in the rear-view mirror confirmed that Bedelia was sitting in the backseat. She was dressed in the same clothes she had worn when they had found her in Florence.

“I think he is mostly bored and wants to be entertained,” Will contradicted.

“And if he is lonely, then it’s because he doesn’t let anyone get close to him,” he continued in a strong voice. “He cannot risk letting anyone see the real him.”

“He is letting you in,” Bedelia said slowly.

“Into his bed and to the opera. You came this far too,” Will said and he could hear the aggression in his voice.

Bedelia always made him angry. *Jealous*, he corrected himself.

He could feel her eyes focusing on him as she spoke in a clear and controlled voice: “Do you wish to crush me when you think about how similar we are now?”

We are not similar, Will wanted to shout, but he could see the similarities. Like Bedelia, he had joined Hannibal willingly this time, but unlike her, he had no plan to leave.

“The question isn’t how far I have come, it’s how far I’m willing to go,” he said and looked

in the mirror. Bedelia watched him with a stony face.

“To walk beside Hannibal means killing and feasting on the remains of the victims,” she said slowly. “Are you willing to adapt to it? I wasn’t.”

Will thought about it while staring at the road. This morning, he had eaten human flesh as he had many times before. But this time he had eaten it voluntarily and with no plans to bring Hannibal to justice.

“Hannibal,” Bedelia said slowly, “cherishes your gift of empathy because it enables you to understand him. But it’s not just Hannibal you can understand, and neither is it just killers.”

Will swallowed. “No, it isn’t.”

He could understand everyone. It was the main reason he avoided people and preferred dogs over humans. Constantly feeling empathy with other people was tiring. And concentrating on the killers didn’t spare him from empathizing with the victims too.

“Your victims,” Bedelia said. “So far they have been killers. Predators.”

Not Chilton, Will thought, but nodded. He knew what Bedelia meant.

“It’s easier to kill killers,” he said. Knowing that Hobbs and Tier were killers, or would be killers, had made it easier to kill them.

“Now imagine sitting at the meticulously decorated dinner table and watch Hannibal kill a guest for being rude. You see the man die in front of you and are unable to help him.”

Will’s breath quickened. He could very easily imagine it; seeing victims get tortured and killed and a piece of himself dying with each one of them.

“It’s his pathology,” he said and while he said it he was wondering about his words. Was he apologizing for Hannibal, making excuses for him?

“Yes,” Bedelia said. She sounded very satisfied at his words. “And you cannot change it. Your choice is living with it and compromising for the relationship or not being with Hannibal.”

Will stared angrily at the road.

“I don’t think I should take relationship advice from you, Bedelia,” he said through his teeth.

“Why am I here then?” She asked with annoyance in her voice.

Yes, Will asked himself. Why was she? Why, from all his ghosts of the past, was he calling her up with his imagination?

“Because I’m angry,” he said. “And you always succeed in bringing my anger out. You tend

to tell me what I don't want to hear."

But it wasn't always true because she had been angry and jealous too. She would always try to separate them with poisoned words.

"We would have come for you," he said, surprising himself and gripping the wheel harder. He could see it now. Hannibal would have made a feast out of her. Will would have insisted on keeping her alive as long as possible to be petty. Hannibal would have been amused and would have followed his bidding, curious to see their interactions.

"Would you have enjoyed it?" Bedelia asked calmly. "Knowing he could easily kill me even after having me at his side for so long."

Will huffed, half amused and half angry.

"You and I are not alike," he told her.

"Maybe we weren't with your old Hannibal, but right now…" she smiled viciously as he looked in the mirror to see her. "Right now, you are a plaything like I was. You haven't changed him, and this Hannibal would rather kill you than burn his whole existence to the ground for your attention. He doesn't burn for you as you burn for him."

It stung because he knew she was right. His first impulse was to turn his car around and drive back to Baltimore, to her house and leave carnage there.

Instead, he made himself take deep breaths. Bedelia was here because he needed to have this discussion and it was easier with a sounding board than trying to work through it alone.

"I have to change him then," he said and straightened up in his seat.

Bedelia laughed.

"I did it before," Will said defensively. "I can do it again."

"By bending down for him and letting him fuck you?" She asked crudely. Will flinched and felt himself blush at the memory of the shower. It turned him on to remember, but at the same time he was worried. Showing any weakness was dangerous when one was dealing with Hannibal, and he had often behaved submissively in their interactions.

"Why don't you just shoot yourself right now?" She goaded. "It would be less painful."

"Why don't you just piss off?" Will bit back. But she stayed while he sat fuming in his seat the whole drive back, thinking about how to change Hannibal. It was distracting to have her staring at his back even without her talking.

He had hoped she would be gone when he arrived home, but she followed him into his house and moved about gingerly, as if she was avoiding non-existent dirt on the floor. She didn't sit down but kept standing in the living room, ignored by the dogs and with a judging look on

her face.

He ignored her as long as he could, but in the end, he went for a walk with his dogs to avoid her relentless stare. As expected, she didn't follow him through the muddy fields, but her words did.

Will didn't have insecurities with regard to Hannibal's sophistication and his own humble upbringing. Apart from dressing Will up for the Opera, neither his old Hannibal, nor this one, had ever shown any indication that he wanted to change Will so that he would fit better into Hannibal's lifestyle. Clothing was an aesthetic consideration for Hannibal, not a money issue. Bedelia couldn't rattle him with that. Will was more concerned about ending up on the menu or Hannibal losing interest. He had presented himself as a romantic partner. Being his partner took away the chance of Hannibal manipulating him in therapy. So far Hannibal seemed satisfied with the arrangement. Still, he had sent a killer after Will. However, it was a killer which wouldn't comply to Hannibal's wishes to come after Will. He wondered how Hannibal would react when Will's prediction about the Admirer came true, and he wasn't attacked. What would Hannibal's next move be?

Will stopped in the field as Buster brought him a stick and he threw it far and watched the dogs run after it.

He wouldn't put it past Hannibal to have seen through Will, of course. Will didn't think he had, but maybe Hannibal knew he was the killer and was playing him right back. Or he suspected and was testing Will.

He sighed at the possibilities. Most of the time he was sure Hannibal didn't know about him, but then he started doubting. Everything moved really fast, and he felt so intimate and close to Hannibal, mostly due to his experiences from his old life. He needed to slow down their relationship, and he needed to resolve the situation with the Ripper's admirer.

Winston had retrieved the stick, and Will patted his head before he threw it again in Marvin's direction. The little Chihuahua-mix hadn't made it back to him yet like the bigger dogs.

He didn't think it likely that Hannibal suspected him. His questions about the Ripper's admirer had seemed genuine. Will's answer and explanations as to why the Admirer wouldn't change his victim profile should be convincing enough. The psychology was sound.

The question was what should the Admirer do? Will's alter ego had shown he knew about Hannibal when killing his victims. He was a danger to Hannibal and Will was pretty sure Hannibal had sent him in Will's direction to get rid of him and also see what Will would do.

It was interesting how similar the situation was to the case of Tobias Budge. Budge had serenaded the Ripper and Hannibal had sent Will after him.

Will smiled at the memory of a wounded Hannibal in his office. Will had been so relieved to see Hannibal alive and, even with all he had found out afterwards, he was sure Hannibal had been relieved too. They hadn't known each other as long this time around as they had then,

but Will wondered if he could entice a similar reaction if he were to put himself in danger. The idea was seductive but risky. It was easy to die in Hannibal's world and he wanted to be with Hannibal too much to risk it for some advancement in their relationship. Especially as the relationship was already developing fast.

He walked back to the house, the dogs on his heels, and kept pondering what to do. He wanted to just get rid of his alter ego. After all, Hannibal had already shown he was more interested in Will than in the Admirer. It would probably be easiest to just stop, but apart from being inelegant, it would also leave loose ends. Finding a scapegoat had some allure. He would look into that option and if it didn't work out, he could just retire the Admirer. The Ripper went dormant for months even years too, after all. Will didn't have to continue.

His imagined Bedelia wasn't there when he came home and he was glad for it. He wasn't sure which of his killers would be a good choice as a fall guy. In retrospect, Randall Tier would have been perfect; he knew Hannibal, but that opportunity was gone. Apart from Bedelia, Chiyoh, and Margot, Will didn't know any of Hannibal's fledglings. He was sure there were many others, but their paths had never crossed. Someone completely unrelated would not be convincing for Hannibal.

Budge was a possibility, but he had a very unique style which bore little similarity to the Admirer's kills. Will thought about the situation until he had a very simple idea. However, for all its simplicity, it would need some preparation and time.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

After the fall, Will woke up 9 months before he first met Hannibal and is assuming that he is time traveling.
Will and Hannibal are in a romantic relationship which is developing nicely and Will decided to retire his killer alter ego after Hannibal tried to pitch the killer against Will the FBI consultant, still not knowing they are the same person.

Chapter Notes

English isn't my first language and this fic is the first work I have finished in many years.

Every hit, kudos, comment or tweet or tumblr post are wonderful for me and I'm very grateful! Writing "We Killed a Dragon Last Night" took over 12 months and it's great to hear from readers who liked it.

I'm looking for a beta reader for future projects. Would love to hear from your if you are good at spotting spelling, grammar errors and plot holes. :)

I'm very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17, dan_dresdner and obermietze. Thank you so much for all your help!

All remaining errors are mine.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will couldn't set his plan to find a scapegoat in motion right away. Jack had more or less ordered him to join the team in the lab for the coming week after classes, and on the next weekend Hannibal was coming over to Wolf Trap. He couldn't rush into this.

Instead, he spent the rest of his weekend tidying the house, images of Bedelia's disgust at the back of his mind. He didn't change things too much, but he moved more of his stuff upstairs to his new bedroom. It still felt a bit strange to be using the room, but he slept well in it, and his living room felt more like a living room now.

Monday brought classes, and some trainee with a mustache tried to grill Will about the Ripper killings shortly before lunch. The students got curious once in awhile and Will sporadically lectured about current cases, but this case in particular was hot, and he wasn't

allowed to talk about it. Will felt increasingly annoyed with each of the trainees' invasive questions. He could feel the class picking up on his mood, and the trainee got some admonishing looks from his fellow students.

When the lecture finally ended, he pretended to be busy at his desk so nobody would try to speak to him. Will frowned as he felt and heard someone step up behind him. He turned around expecting the bothersome trainee but instead he found Hannibal in front of him, wearing a red and black checkered suit and a slight smile. For a moment, Will wasn't sure if he wasn't hallucinating, but then he noticed the side glances from the trainees as they were packing up.

"Hello, Will," Hannibal, the real Hannibal, said and leaned forward to press a soft kiss against Will's lips. Startled, Will let it happen and blinked when Hannibal stepped back, not smiling anymore.

"What are you doing here?" Will asked, confused.

Hannibal looked sideways, seemingly chastised.

"Jack invited me," he said. "He asked me to visit after our meeting last week."

Will rolled his eyes as he guessed why. "He wanted to grill you about us and he wants you to consult?"

Hannibal smiled widely.

"Yes. I gather he didn't tell you?"

"No," Will said. "I might have protested."

Will felt himself flush when Hannibal raised his eyebrows questioning.

"Not because I think you aren't qualified. You are, more so than me, to be honest," Will explained. "But I would prefer to keep you for myself and not involve you in this dark side of my life?"

Agitated, Will took off his glasses. Most of his students had left, but he could see some of them lingering at the entrance of the room, showing no intention of leaving. Probably curious about Hannibal and the fact that they had kissed. People would talk about him and Hannibal, and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

It made him tense and defensive, and he also knew Hannibal had most likely done it on purpose. Frowning, Will put his glasses back on. He took a step around Hannibal and addressed the group of spectators.

"Do you have any questions?" he asked directly and wasn't in the least surprised when they didn't. Will turned back to Hannibal after he had watched them leave.

He wanted to tell Hannibal that he was an asshole for outing their relationship and coming to his workplace without warning him. And for taking a job at Will's workplace, because Will was very sure Hannibal had agreed to consult. It was stalker behavior, and of course, that was right up Hannibal's alley.

"You seem angry," Hannibal stated, absolutely calm.

"I am," Will said and rubbed his right temple without looking at Hannibal. Will wasn't as good as Hannibal with his poker face, and Hannibal was way too perceptive for someone who didn't feel a lot of real and deep emotions on a regular basis.

"If a patient of yours told you their partner got a job interview at their employer's without telling them, and then walked into their place of work, where nobody knows much about their private life, and showed off to everyone they are an item, what would you tell that client?" he asked and took a deep breath. He had said it, and he could only hope that his insights would intrigue Hannibal and not annoy him. Hannibal's face was unreadable and he lowered his head forward after a moment.

"I must apologize," he said earnestly. "I wished to surprise you and instead I angered you."

Gotcha, Will thought with relief, which lightened his anger. He knew Hannibal would try to squirm free of Will's accusation and he also knew he would have to accept it to stay in role. He tried to reach back to his old self, the one that had believed Hannibal about so many things.

"If it helps, I told Jack that I wouldn't make a decision without consulting you."

Will nodded without looking Hannibal in the eye.

"It helps," he said.

"But you are still angry?" Hannibal asked.

"Yes," Will said. He was reluctant to simply forgive Hannibal. He realized how he handled this would set a precedent for later. He couldn't let Hannibal walk all over him.

Will turned, walked to the entrance and closed the door. He straightened himself before he turned again and walked back to Hannibal.

"You are curious about my gift," he said and looked at Hannibal. He didn't seem stressed, but Will could see how stiff his shoulders got and how his face froze. His hands were hiding behind the coat he was holding. Will knew Hannibal was ready to fight, his fingers tense in anticipation of action.

"Jack contacted you, and it flattered you to be asked to consult. Even knowing it was partially because of me, you like the idea. You like being asked, being courted for your expertise. But you like the chance to watch me work even more. You knew you should tell me, but it's easier to ask for forgiveness than for permission, so you went ahead without speaking with

me."

Will paused and licked his lips. Hannibal was watching him very closely, his whole body rigid under the suit.

"I'm not surprised because I see you," he continued. "I can see your need to control your environment, including the people in it."

Will's anger drained away as he realized that Hannibal's face had stopped being expressionless, and that some small signs of yearning were displayed on it.

There you are, Will thought. *I see you*.

"What makes me angry, Hannibal," he concluded a bit tiredly, opening the fists he had made while talking, "is that you believed I wouldn't realize your manipulation."

Will was sure that Hannibal would find his words soon and would try to talk his way out of Will's accusation, but he didn't want to hear any excuses. He stepped closer to Hannibal, cautiously, like Hannibal was a wild beast to be tamed. He smiled as he reached for Hannibal's face with his hands. Hannibal looked surprised as Will leaned in and gently kissed him with open lips. At first, Hannibal didn't respond, but then his lips and his face softened, and Will slipped his tongue into his mouth and enjoyed the uncharacteristic submission. Will moved his hands from Hannibal's face into his hair and gripped him lightly. He stepped closer and closer to Hannibal while he was kissing him. Hannibal had to walk backwards, away from Will, until they reached his desk. He pushed Hannibal against it and felt the coat fall on the ground, as did some of the folders from Will's desk. Thoughts about Hannibal's manipulation went out of Will's mind. He felt incredibly turned on when he realized Hannibal had sat down on the table. Long legs hooked around Will's hips and arms around his upper body. Hannibal pressed them together and then leaned backwards until he was lying mostly on the table and Will on top of him.

It couldn't be comfortable because the table wasn't long enough and Will stopped kissing Hannibal and let go of his hair to hold Hannibal by the waist instead.

"This is a very seductive gesture of apology, Hannibal," he said with a rough voice and let their eyes meet. Hannibal's were shadowed by his rumpled hair.

"But you would prefer it if I wouldn't underestimate you again?"

Will laughed, because of course Hannibal wouldn't apologize for manipulating him.

"Yes, I would," he said with a smile that widened when he saw Hannibal was smiling too.

He pulled Hannibal a bit up and held him close. He shuddered when his body got the message, that there would be no sex. He was hard, and he was close enough to Hannibal to know Hannibal wasn't unaffected either.

"Are you okay?" he asked Hannibal and was met with a curious expression. Will pulled him

a bit closer until their faces were so close to each other that he could lean his forehead against Hannibal's.

"Is it unsettling that I looked… behind the veil?"

Hannibal was silent, and Will could feel him consider Will's question.

"Or is it attractive?" Will asked. Hannibal laughed. Will's eyes widened as he felt the movement in Hannibal's whole body.

"Very attractive," Hannibal said with a relaxed smile. "And also a bit unsettling. I shall endeavor not to… play you in future and I apologize."

Will smiled in surprise at the unexpected apology. It was nice to see the real Hannibal shine through. He didn't believe him about not being played in future, but he appreciated the effort Hannibal was making right now.

"So, did you bring lunch?" he asked him.

"I'm starting to feel very transparent, Will," Hannibal said amused.

Will smirked.

"I think everybody who has ever eaten at your place knows you won't eat in a cafeteria, Hannibal."

He leaned a bit backwards so he could see Hannibal better. He looked very debauched, his hair messed up and his suit out of order.

"I left it in the car," Hannibal said and let his legs slide down from Will's waist. Will wanted to pull them back up; they were very nice and long.

"Bring it in and we'll eat here before we go to Jack." Will suggested and tried to smooth out Hannibal's hair. He didn't make it any better, but it felt nice under his fingers.

Hannibal gave him a single nod and Will sighed as he stepped backwards so Hannibal could get up.

He bent down and lifted the coat up to hand it to Hannibal. Miraculously he had smoothed his hair somehow and was now working on straightening his suit.

"You have to teach me how to do this someday," Will told him as he handed the coat over. Hannibal kissed him, smiling, and then he went to the parking lot. Will was alone in the too big room.

Hannibal's lunch turned out to be sushi, and he hadn't just brought the food but also all utensils needed to eat them. Will was amazed as his desk transformed into a table setting worthy of a restaurant. Will changed only one thing before he joined Hannibal; he moved his

chair from opposite end of the desk to Hannibal's side, for which he received a smile.

He sent a killer after you, Will reminded himself. *Again.*

He prompted Hannibal with questions about the food so that they wouldn't talk about anything too deep. It worked remarkably well; he would have to remember the tactic.

Later he led them down to Jack's office, and Will knocked on the half open door. Jack was alone and waved them in. The brainstorming would probably be pointless and tiring, as no new evidence had shown up and Will couldn't offer any more insights. But with Hannibal there, it might become more interesting, and Will would have to be careful not to show off for him.

"I heard you have been trying to poach Hannibal, Jack," Will said in a way of greeting.

"After checking his credentials I asked him to consult," Jack answered without a hint of guilt. Will could barely stop himself from rolling his eyes.

"Have you decided yet, Dr. Lecter?" he asked Hannibal who had stepped in the room after Will.

"After discussing your offer with Will, we agreed that I will consult on this case," Hannibal answered and Will felt surprised at the choice of words. In Will's opinion, he had given Hannibal carte blanche, so it was surprising that Hannibal was only talking about this case now. But it shouldn't be surprising. Hannibal had always preferred to show a unified front with Will when dealing with Jack.

"Good," Jack answered with a satisfied smile and handed a folder to Hannibal. "I will need your signature on these, and afterwards Will can brief you on the case."

Hannibal took ages to read through the papers and Will found it very entertaining to watch Jack getting impatient but being too polite to rush Hannibal. Will excused himself to get coffee for himself and Jack as well as a bottle of water and a glass for Hannibal. On his way back he met Beverly in the corridor.

"Hey!" she greeted him with a smile. "Your doctor in already?"

"Yes, Jack has him reading through a consultant contract." He sighed.

"What's the matter?" she asked and tilted her head to the side widely grinning. "You don't want to mix work and pleasure?"

Will rolled his eyes at the phrasing.

"It's okay," he said. "I think it will be good to have his input. I just hope it doesn't end up being a therapy session. Are you joining us for the briefing?"

“No clue. Jack said to be prepared for another brainstorming session today. So maybe?”

“Well, I wouldn’t mind company. I have this feeling that revisiting the whole ‘Ripper and his admirer’ case will give me a headache.”

They parted with Beverly telling him good luck and opening the door for him.

Will placed the coffees on Jack’s table and filled the glass for Hannibal, who seemed to be on the last page of the contract. He looked up when Will placed the glass before him and thanked him.

“This seems to be in order,” Hannibal finally said and signed the contract. “My apologies for making you wait.”

Jack murmured something about it not being a problem and pushed a big folder over to Will.

The briefing took nearly two hours, and at some point, Hannibal shared his water with Will when his voice became hoarse. In the alternative timeline bringing Hannibal up to speed with the Ripper had been done over many not-therapy-sessions, so Will was a bit surprised it only took two hours. Jack was adding information from time to time, and Hannibal listened and sometimes asked thoughtful questions.

“Randall Tier?” Hannibal asked towards the end, when they were discussing the Admirer, and Will waited, curious how he would sell his connection with the victim. Randall Tier’s name hadn’t been in the press, but Hannibal had very likely recognized him from the location of the body.

“I had a patient of that name once. May I see a picture?”

Will leafed through the file and handed Hannibal a photo of Randall from before.

Hannibal stared at it for a moment and then looked to Jack.

“Randall was a patient of mine when he was younger.”

Jack raised his eyebrows and Will frowned to fake his surprise at the reveal.

“You didn’t know Clark Ingram, did you?” he asked Hannibal, to take the initiative from Jack.

Hannibal shook his head.

“No, I’m not aware of ever meeting Mr. Ingram. But with my knowledge of Randall, I believe I can offer a new perspective.”

He put the photo on the table between them and leaned back in his chair.

“Clark Ingram was a serial killer. I cannot go into the details of Randall’s therapy; he was a

child when his parents brought him to me. But I can say that he was capable of acts of extreme violence when he started therapy with me. He saw himself as more animal than human, which gives the bone chrysalis a new possibility of interpretation, I believe. Unfortunately, his parents decided against further sessions after a few months and some improvement."

"You believe he was capable of murder or at least violence?" Will ignored Jack to take up the verbal ball Hannibal had just thrown. Hannibal nodded.

"That would give the Ripper's admirer a victim profile, Jack. Maybe we should check Randall Tier's background again." Will looked to him and was pleased as Jack nodded.

"We will put Beverly on it," he said.

Hannibal had taken the crime scene pictures of the Admirer in his hands and was looking through them. Will hoped that he found them interesting.

"Maybe it could lead us to the Ripper," Jack thought out loud. "If we assume Randall Tier was a killer or a killer-to-be, that would mean the Admirer is after killers. We are assuming the Admirer wants the Ripper's attention because the Ripper is reacting to the crime scenes. But maybe the Ripper is reacting because he knew the killers. There is someone in his territory who is killing predators off and he sees it as a challenge."

Will pulled a face at this simplistic interpretation of the Ripper and made sure not to look to Hannibal for his reaction. He was sure Hannibal was wearing his stony face.

"I'm certain the Admirer knows the Ripper somehow," Will interjected without looking at Jack. He didn't want to seem confrontational. "His kills feel very intimate to me, like a show."

He looked to Hannibal who was watching him closely.

"It's like he is saying: I'm here. See how well I'm performing. Look at me," Will said, feeling the thrill of saying it into Hannibal's face.

"You believe he is infatuated with the Ripper?" Hannibal asked.

"He feels the need to communicate with him. And the more the Ripper answers, the more he will try to prove himself. To show how well he can dance." Will said.

"Do they know each other?" Jack asked pointedly and Will bit his lips.

"I'm not sure. The Ripper doesn't seem to know his Admirer. I think if he knew him, he would have gone and killed him after Ingram. The kill in the observatory was very blunt for him. He was angry."

Will took off his glasses and massaged between his eyes. He was getting a headache from the discussion. It was difficult to keep in mind what he officially knew, what he was guessing and

what he just couldn't know. He was grateful to have the physical file to keep track of which information he could safely refer to.

"It's all a bit confusing, and I think not just for us, but for the Ripper too."

"May I suggest that I take a closer look into the Ripper's case for the moment?" Hannibal asked while looking to Jack. "There is a great amount of information in the file, and I would like to attempt a fresh take on it."

"Of course, Will can take you to the forensic experts that work on the current cases for more detail, and we can give you access to the old case files. You have to study them here, though."

Hannibal nodded once in agreement and Will suppressed a smirk. Jack had just offered the Chesapeake Ripper complete access to his own case, and he would even pay him money to look into it. Hannibal must be preening inwardly.

"I'm free today and this evening and then, unfortunately, not at all until next week."

"Let's go to the lab then," Will offered. "I will introduce you."

Beverly was sorting through samples when Will led Hannibal into the lab. Zeller and Price were arguing over the bones from the chrysalis.

"It's a hip bone," Zeller said in a strong voice and was holding a flat piece of bone in Jimmy's face.

Will smiled at the antics.

"Agent Katz," Hannibal said beside him. Beverly looked up and took off her gloves when Hannibal offered his hand.

"Doctor Lecter," she answered his greeting and shook his hand.

"It's good to meet you again under better circumstances," Hannibal said.

Zeller and Price had put away the bone and came closer. Price was scanning Hannibal like a new piece of evidence that had been delivered to them, while Zeller's eyes drifted from Will to Hannibal and back.

Either Beverly had spilled the beans, or news of Hannibal's earlier display in Will's classroom had already spread.

"And please call me Hannibal."

That's new, Will thought and couldn't help but raise his eyebrows. In the old timeline, Hannibal hadn't been very familiar with the three agents. He had concentrated on Jack and

Will.

“If you call me Beverly.”

“With pleasure,” Hannibal answered and turned to greet Zeller and Price.

“Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller,” Will introduced him. “Dr. Hannibal Lecter.”

They shook hands and Zeller was still looking between the two of them. Will rolled his eyes and made sure Zeller saw it. The answering sheepish smile surprised him, and he couldn’t help but smile back.

“Hannibal has agreed to consult on the case of the Ripper and the Admirer. Jack and I briefed him on the general outline but not all the forensics.”

“You have come to the right place then,” Jimmy said and then went right in.

Will listened with only one ear as his colleagues walked Hannibal through the existing evidence. Mostly he watched Hannibal who seemed very curious and polite. He showed no hesitation when the bodies were displayed, nor acted out of place in any manner, but got in the way once or twice when Jimmy and Zeller were moving around. Will had to pull him out of the way and got a grateful smile from Hannibal and a thumbs-up from Jimmy when Hannibal wasn’t looking.

Hannibal paid as much attention to the Ripper’s victims as he did to Will’s which was only logical but Will was impressed by his dedication on pretending he didn’t know about the Ripper’s victims.

“The differences in style of these two killers are quite striking. The Admirer mutilates his victims post-mortem,” Hannibal told Will when Beverly and Jimmy were rolling a body on a table out of the lab. Will nodded.

“Maybe he is squeamish,” Zeller jumped in.

“Possibly,” Hannibal said without really looking at Brian. He was frowning at Will. “I was thinking he seems to be very familiar with the way the Ripper presents his kills. The obvious conclusion being that he knows the Ripper.”

“But we assume the Ripper doesn’t know him,” Will followed up the idea as Beverly and Jimmy came back.

“You think it’s someone with access to the case?” Will asked.

Silence came down on the lab as everybody pondered over the idea. Will suppressed a smile. Hannibal had played into his plan.

“Who had access to the Ripper case - enough to be familiar with it?”

“Lots of people at this point,” Beverly said and sat down at one of their chairs.

“The Ripper has been active for years. There are a lot of police, profilers, lab technicians, FBI agents who know the files or at least part of them.”

“It’s a big pool of candidates,” Will sighed. “Everyone in this room is in it. With the exception of Hannibal.”

“And you,” Beverly told him. “You only got full access after the Admirer killed Ingram. Maybe the two of you should have a look at possible suspects.”

“Should we discuss this with Agent Crawford?” Hannibal asked.

“I will tell him and let you know how we proceed,” Beverly said.

Hannibal nodded once and picked up his coat.

“I will process the information I received today and write down my impressions for Agent Crawford.”

And discuss it with me while we are cooking, Will thought and smiled.

“I will walk you to your car,” Will said. “It’s time for me to leave anyway. The dogs will be hungry.”

They both said their goodbyes and went back to Will’s classroom to get his things.

“We’ll see each other on Friday?” Will asked as they were standing in the parking lot beside Hannibal's Bentley.

“I’m looking forward to it,” Hannibal replied and smiled. “It was an interesting afternoon.”

“Watching me in my natural environment?” Will asked back with a slight smirk and Hannibal dropped his head in acknowledgment. Will’s smirk changed to a smile.

“You will like watching me in my home then,” he added. “You might want to dress more casually, though. The dog hair won’t agree with your suits.”

“I shall venture to dress appropriately.”

Will leaned in to kiss Hannibal lightly. “Goodbye, Hannibal.”

“Goodbye, Will.”

He went to his own car which was parked on the other side of the building. His list of things to do got longer every day. Hannibal seemed very relaxed and happy with his life of subterfuge, but Will found the constant scheming increasingly exhausting.

But he had to follow through on his plan.

He drove home, looked after his dogs and found an email from Alana about Larry in his inbox. He called her back instead of writing an answer. They spoke about a possible date for her to collect Larry and agreed on the week after this one. This was good because it gave Will time for his plans.

“So,” Alana said after they had fixed a date. “How are things with Hannibal?”

“Good,” Will answered, unsure where she was going with her question.

“Anything you want to talk about?” Alana asked and Will frowned.

“Anything you want to know, Alana?” he returned, and heard her sigh.

“How was the opera, Will? Was it okay?” she asked and Will understood where she was coming from.

“It was okay,” he answered. “Not my favorite outing but we didn’t stay afterwards. If Hannibal wants me to, I will go again. And stop worrying, I’m capable of saying no if I don’t want to do something.”

“I’m your friend,” she said. “It’s my job to worry a bit.”

“Will you be making the same call to Hannibal?” Will asked and stopped as he realized how snippy he sounded. “Sorry,” he added and reminded himself this Alana had never had a relationship with Hannibal. She was his friend and Hannibal’s friend, and she was trying to look out for Will because she worried about him.

“No, you are right. I really shouldn’t favor you. I’ll check up on Hannibal too.”

The idea made Will snort.

“Ask him if he has chosen what to wear this Friday,” he suggested.

“Why?” Alana asked and Will grinned.

“I told him to down dress because of the dogs.”

Alana laughed.

“Can I offer you anything to get pictures?” she asked, still laughing.

“It has been a while since I was in a relationship,” Will lied, “but I think it’s my duty to be more loyal to him than to my friends.”

“Pity,” Alana said and he could hear her grinning.

Will tried to go back to writing afterwards but he felt restless. There was much to be done and moves from Hannibal to anticipate. Being with Hannibal made Will happy, but he couldn't let his guard down too much. He was not even sure he would survive the reaction of this Hannibal when he realized Will was playing him. How much of the affection Hannibal expressed towards Will was real was a mystery to him, and it was difficult not to take Hannibal's courting and fondness at face value. His Hannibal loved him and was willing to go to jail so Will would know where he was. This Hannibal probably wasn't close to that point yet, and maybe he never would be.

The next day his vet called and told him about someone looking for a dog. It was actually a man who had previously adopted one of Will's strays. Will called him up afterwards. They chatted amicably about the old dog, who had died a few months ago, it made Will melancholic to hear it. The little mutt had been a good dog. Will told him about Marvin and Buster, as he couldn't imagine giving Winston away at the moment. Even talking about giving Buster and Marvin away felt wrong, with the day of Larry going to Alana looming in the near future. They agreed to meet, but Will couldn't bring himself to confirm a date and told the man he would call again.

Will's anxiety got the better of him on Friday, a few hours before Hannibal was due to arrive. He had cleaned his house, and they had spoken about the visit and easily agreed that Hannibal would stay the night. But Bedelia was hovering in the corner of his eye, and he kept thinking back to the last time he and Hannibal were in his kitchen. They had shared the space with Abigail's ear, then.

In the end, he took the dogs upstairs, because he had no memories of Hannibal ever being upstairs, and into the bedroom there. He shouldn't because he would be taking Hannibal up there later and…, well, dog hairs. He would have to change the bed linen, again.

But the dogs enjoyed the treat and Will calmed down with them lying beside him on the bed.

"Piss off, Bedelia," he told her when she showed up in the doorway. He wasn't in the mood for psychoanalysis.

"You should have run before he met you this time," she told him without stepping in the room. Will considered getting up and closing the door in her face.

"I decided against it," he told her instead and hugged Buster, who snuggled warmly against Will's stomach.

"Stupidity," Bedelia answered and Will really wanted to close his eyes and ignore her, but she was just too present.

"Love," he said and watched her falter at the word.

"Like a dog loves his owner," she said. "An owner who could easily kill his pet without consequence."

True enough, Will thought. Even his Hannibal would have been able to kill Will easily. He would have regretted it and missed him, but he could have done it if necessary. But Will loved him. He loved the old Hannibal, full of scars from Will on the inside and the outside, and he loved this Hannibal, who was without scars and untouched by the anguish Will's struggle had brought them.

"Sometimes the devotion of a pet is betrayed, sometimes it isn't," Will answered her and closed his eyes. "If you are not going to be helpful Bedelia, you should go. I didn't book an appointment after all."

He didn't open his eyes for a while and fell asleep with the warm bodies of his dogs around him. He dreamed of Lecter castle and fireflies dancing in the night around a totem pole of Will's victims.

His doorbell woke him, and Will looked around, disoriented, expecting old castle walls and finding the painted walls of his house instead. Buster, Marvin, Larry and Winston were lying around him on his bed. When the doorbell rang again, Will got up and hurried downstairs, the dogs at his heels.

He opened the door and smiled at Hannibal, who was standing there with Will's cooler in his hands.

"Hi," Will greeted him.

"Hello Will," Hannibal replied and they exchanged an expected and still surprisingly gentle kiss on the lips.

Will moved aside to let Hannibal in. "Please come in, sorry, if you had to wait. I fell asleep."

Hannibal hesitated and when Will looked behind himself, he saw why. The dogs had sat down in Hannibal's pathway and were eagerly watching him.

"Tz, tz," Will hissed and snapped his fingers to bring them to attention.

"Stop intimidating our guest," he told them and ordered: "Go to your beds."

Buster, Marvin, and Larry knew that command and hurried to their dog beds, but Winston was too new, and Will had to lead him to his dog bed and make him lie down. When he turned back to the door, Hannibal had come in and was watching him.

"Winston is new," he said in explanation. "He still has to learn some rules."

"They seem very well behaved," Hannibal said and Will felt the usual pride for his dog's surface.

"Thank you," he said smiling. Hannibal had left the door open and hadn't started to take off his coat.

“So,” Will asked with a mischievous smile. “How much of your kitchen is in your car?”

Hannibal smiled back at him, and it was a gloriously honest smile. It made Will’s knees go weak.

“I brought some special equipment with which the average kitchen may not be equipped,” Hannibal explained and Will stepped closer.

“Sure,” he said, still smiling at Hannibal. “Let me help you to carry them inside?”

“I would appreciate your help.”

Will slipped on his shoes and followed Hannibal outside. There were two boxes in the car, and Will carried one inside, followed closely by Hannibal who carried the second. He led them both into the kitchen and let Hannibal get used to the layout while he went back to collect the cooler.
The dogs were all still sitting or lying in their beds, and Will gave each a treat for listening to him.

“How was your week?” Will asked from the doorway when he came back to the kitchen. “And should I tell you where everything is?”

Hannibal had taken off his coat, and to Will’s satisfaction, he was wearing a cotton maroon jumper with V-neck and black trousers instead of a three-piece-suit. Knowing that Hannibal had dressed down for him, made him feel warm inside.

“I would appreciate a tour of the house,” Hannibal said.

Will was confused for a moment until he remembered that this Hannibal hadn’t been there before. He had taken Will’s offer to explain the kitchen as an offer to tour the house.

“Come along then,” Will said smiling when he had overcome his surprise. Hannibal took his time exploring the living room. He lingered over Will’s bookcase and the piano.

“Do you play?” he asked Will.

“A bit,” Will answered. “It helps me relax sometimes but I’m not a musician, I just know how to move my fingers and read notes. You play, don’t you?”

Hannibal nodded. “The harpsichord mainly. It’s more alive, the music arrives suddenly and whole, while the sounds of a piano echo like a memory.”

“You will have to play for me,” Will said and took Hannibal’s hand.

“As will you,” Hannibal said.

“Will you greet the dogs?” Will asked. Hannibal blinked and then nodded.

“Thank you,” Will said and pulled him over to the dog beds.

“This is Larry,” Will introduced the tall dog, and Hannibal leaned forward to hold his hand out for Larry to inspect. Will smiled at the appropriate behavior. “He will go to Alana soon.”

Buster left his bed with Marvin at his heels, both coming closer to get some attention too, and Will could only shake his head.

“That’s Buster, the small one is Marvin, and this is Winston. Winston came to me last week.”

The dog came when Will called him, and soon Hannibal was slowly petting each dog’s head after they had smelled him.

“How did Winston join your family?” Hannibal asked when Will had shown him downstairs and was now leading him up the stairs.

“I didn’t tell you?” Will asked. He thought he had mentioned him. Will told him an edited version of the story of the poor owner and hungry dog while he showed Hannibal his bathroom. The story ended in the bedroom.

“That was very good of you,” Hannibal said and his gaze fell upon Will’s bed.

Will shrugged his shoulders. “I wanted to help Winston and helping his owner was the way to do that.”

“It’s still more than most people would do.”

“I am a bit obsessed with dogs,” Will joked. Hannibal looked over to him with an unreadable expression.

“This room hasn’t been in use long,” he said out of the blue and Will felt himself blush.

“I slept downstairs on a fold out couch until recently,” he explained. “It was time for a change.”

“And you gave away many of your dogs,” Hannibal mused. “You have changed your life a lot in recent months.”

Will rolled his eyes and poked Hannibal’s arm. Which brought out some delightfully real surprise on Hannibal’s face.

“Don’t psychoanalyze me, Dr. Lecter,” he warned. “If you psychoanalyze me, I will be your patient and not your lover, and your patient would kick you out after dinner.”

One corner of Hannibal’s lips curled at Will’s sass and Will smiled, satisfied at the reaction. He decided to give Hannibal something for it.

“And yes, I bought a new bed and moved it into this room with you in mind.”

“I am very grateful,” Hannibal said with a wide smile.

“Good,” Will said. For a moment Will just wanted to drag Hannibal to bed and ravish him. This constant need for bodily contact was a bit awkward. But he had the excuse that his sexual involvement with Hannibal was new and his body was still gorging itself on him.

“Let’s cook?” he asked to distract himself from thoughts of sex.

Hannibal smiled. “It would be my pleasure.”

Will couldn’t stop smiling when the boxes Hannibal brought were emptied. He hadn't brought his whole kitchen, but it was close.

He helped with cutting ingredients and tried not to think about the meat Hannibal was preparing. He had left part of his revulsion behind when he had been luring Hannibal after his own incarceration in the BSHCI, but it was still daunting to know the meat had been a person. Will promised himself he would make sure they would stick to bad people when their veils had fallen.

The meal they were preparing was a casserole, and when it was in the oven, they left for the living room with some wine. Will automatically went for the armchairs and then, remembering the pull-out couch he had slept on was a couch again, stopped in his tracks. He looked sheepishly at Hannibal.

“Couch or armchairs?”

Hannibal smiled and Will knew that he understood the underlying question of how close they would be.

“I thought we might discuss the cases and my profile, first,” he said and Will felt somewhat disappointed but not surprised. Of course, Hannibal wanted to speak about himself. He settled on the armchair and watched Hannibal sit down in the other. They were facing each other, and it brought up memories; he smelled his wine and sipped from it.

“I read your profiles of the Ripper and the Admirer,” Will said holding his glass at the stem.

“Did you agree?” Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged.

“I think you were holding back with the Ripper,” he answered. If Hannibal wanted praise in either persona, Will would make him work for it.

“In which regard?” Hannibal asked and Will smiled at the pretended confusion. Or maybe it was real, and Hannibal was confused by how quickly Will had found him out.

“You were hesitant to make statements about him,” Will said. “Maybe his profile is similar to your own background. I would be uncomfortable too. In some places you let yourself be distracted from profiling and were analyzing details of his work instead.”

Will was aware of Hannibal watching him very carefully while he spoke. He wondered if he was on thin ice.

“You believe him to be of a similar background to myself,” Hannibal said and Will gave him a sharp nod.

“He has a medical education, most likely a surgeon. He is a well-educated man, who is notable but not suspicious. He likes art, he sees his killing as art, as a way to make the pigs he kills into something beautiful. He elevates them.”

“You admire him,” Hannibal said and Will forced himself not to react at the verb. He waved as if he found the words not important.

“Compared to most serial killers the Ripper is an artist, and his work is beautiful in my eyes,” Will answered and he could feel Hannibal’s amazement and felt a rush of affection for him.

“Your empathy leads you to sympathize with him?” Hannibal guessed and Will smiled.

“Don’t misunderstand me,” he hurried to say, pretending to moralize over his previous words. “I don’t approve of him killing people. But I see the beauty of his work and I understand why he does it. They are pigs in his eyes, not worthy to live. His admirer, however, his victim profile I understand better.”

“If we are right about the way he chooses them,” Hannibal said.

“Yes, but I sense that we are. They are killers and killers are not worthy to live.”

“Is he suicidal, then? He is a killer, too.”

Will blinked at the question and didn’t answer. Hannibal watched him closely.

“He isn’t feeling guilt,” Will offered slowly. “He is making statements for the Ripper, and if he has to kill some predators, he won’t regret it. His messages are more important than the men he is killing. And he won’t kill himself because he kills.”

“You didn’t write this in your profile,” Hannibal said while watching Will very closely.

“I didn’t think of it until you asked your question.”

And he hadn’t wanted to include too much information. He was sure Hannibal had picked up on how thin his profile of the Admirer was. He was pushing him now, using him to gain more information about the Admirer and about how Will’s mind worked.

“Ask me more?” Will requested with a smile to diffuse suspicion. “I would really like to

make the profile better. It feels a little thin to me."

"Why is he interested in the Ripper?"

"Is he?" Will asked. "So far we believe him to admire the Ripper because the Ripper reacted to him."

Will stopped and pretended to think. It wouldn't hurt to appear to go astray for a moment.

"Maybe it was the Ripper who misunderstood the presented work," he said. "And his 'Admirer' only reacted to it?"

Hannibal didn't answer and was just watching him. Will experienced a moment of frustration. They were both playing cat and mouse, and it was difficult for him to keep all the ideas and theories straight.

"What do you think of the Admirer?" he asked Hannibal.

Hannibal leaned back into the armchair and looked at his hands.

"He is pragmatic, goal-oriented and organized," he said and looked at Will. "He has forensic knowledge…"

"As has the Ripper," Will interrupted and Hannibal nodded. "The Admirer doesn't want to be found or seen. The only reason to show his kills is for the message he wants to send."

"The message for the Ripper," Hannibal concluded and Will suppressed a smile.

"Probably."

"And why is he interested in him, Will?" Hannibal asked.

Because I love you, Will thought. *And I want to be with you, and I know you need to respect me and I need you to be impressed.*

"I'm not sure," he said and sighed. "I don't understand him well, yet. And I want to concentrate on the Ripper, if I'm honest."

"Because Jack Crawford pushes you?" Hannibal asked and Will flashed back to countless conversations he had with his Hannibal in the beginning. He wondered if this Hannibal wanted to alienate him from Jack too. It was very likely, he decided.

"Jack is obsessed with the Ripper," he told Hannibal. "I'm sure he came to me for consultation with the Ripper in the back of his mind."

"Are you comfortable working with Jack?"

"I made sure to get in contact with human resources before I started to work with him," Will

told him. “Jack is very much willing to do whatever it takes to get his killers. Sooner or later I will have to put a hold on his demands to protect myself. But deep down he is a good man, who wants to protect the innocent.”

“Are you empathizing with Jack?” Hannibal asked, curious.

Will smiled and fought with himself over the urge to stand up and go over to Hannibal. After a moment, he remembered he didn’t have to fight it and stood up.

Chapter End Notes

Edit 08.09.2019: SerLadyJenn spotted an inconsistency between Will mentioning Winston to Hannibal in chapter 5 to this chapter. I therefore made an edit that's not in the podfic or the translations.

Old version:
“I didn’t tell you?” Will asked, knowing he hadn’t. Hannibal declined and Will told him an edited version of the story of the poor owner and hungry dog while he showed Hannibal his bathroom. The story ended in the bedroom.

New version:
“I didn’t tell you?” Will asked. He thought he had mentioned him. Will told him an edited version of the story of the poor owner and hungry dog while he showed Hannibal his bathroom. The story ended in the bedroom.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

After the fall, Will woke up 9 months before he first met Hannibal.
He met Hannibal and they are in a romantic relationship. Will assumes Hannibal doesn't know Will is the killer that engaged with the Ripper and is trying to retire his killer alter ego.
Meanwhile Jack and his team assume the Ripper might be involved in the investigation, luckily Will and Hannibal got cleared.

Chapter Notes

English isn't my first language and this fic is the first work I have finished in many years.

Thank you sooo much for every hit, kudos, comment or tweet or tumblr post! It's great to hear from readers who liked it.

I'm looking for beta readers for future projects. Would love to hear from you if you are good at spotting spelling, grammar errors and plot holes. :)

I'm very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17 and obermietze. Thank you so much for all your help!

All remaining errors are mine.

"I empathize with everyone," Will said as he stepped towards Hannibal, who looked up at him, amused. Will gingerly sat down on Hannibal's lap. At first he was unsure, because they were both men and Will was heavy, but Hannibal's arm found its way around Will's waist, and it was suddenly natural to sit there. He put his arms around Hannibal's neck and then they were breathing each other's air.

"Part of me will always be the person I'm currently empathizing with. It's never just me," Will whispered and looked into Hannibal's eyes.

"Who is with you now?" Hannibal asked and his free hand was stroking Will's thigh.

"Wish I could say just you," Will answered. "But there is also the Ripper and the Admirer and Jack."

Will grimaced.

Hannibal kissed him, soft and then harder. He bit Will's bottom lip and Will opened his mouth, letting himself be invaded. He closed his eyes and let Hannibal take what he wanted, knowing he wished to expel all other influences in Will's mind. His hands roamed over Will's body while Will had to grip the armchair to not fall off Hannibal's lap. Their positions should have been awkward but having Hannibal take control was too seductive. It made Will forget that he could stumble off Hannibal's lap any moment. It was alluring when Hannibal showed more of himself when they got physical.

Hannibal's lips moved to his throat and Will groaned. *Bite me again*, he thought but didn't say.

"The food…," he said panting.

"This particular casserole," Hannibal said and Will was satisfied that his breath was uneven. "Needs one and a half more hours to finish."

Will laughed breathlessly.

"You chose the recipe with this in mind?" He asked smiling.

"I did not expect you to slide into my lap," Hannibal said instead of answering, but Will could see the corner of his mouth curl up.

"So, do we talk more shop or do we go upstairs while the food is cooking?" Will asked. He wasn't sure what answer he wanted more. Talking about Hannibal's alter ego the Ripper or fucking him. And wasn't it cause for concern that his mind was associating killing with sex now? Will hoped he didn't get his wires crossed permanently.

Hannibal didn't answer verbally, but grabbed Will's waist and pulled them both up.

"Upstairs then," Will concluded and they didn't have to discuss anything when they moved to Will's bedroom. Will tugged his shirt over his head and let it fall to the floor before he turned around to Hannibal, who was undressing too.

It was easy to get naked, to watch Hannibal get naked too and fall into bed with him. Easier than talking murder and so much more enjoyable. It was all hands and tongue and naked skin.

Will straddled Hannibal and smiled down at him when Hannibal touched the bite mark on Will's shoulder, reverently.

"Want to bite it again?" He asked. It would hurt, but it would be worth the pain for it to maybe scar permanently.

Hannibal seemed to consider it, while gently stroking the scab and the reddened skin around it. It hurt and Will remembered the firm but tender grip with which Hannibal had held him before he'd gutted him.

“It is healing well; you have taken care of it. To bite there again could cause infection and scarring,” Hannibal finally said.

Will sighed and Hannibal raised his eyebrows questioningly.

“You would like a scar?” Hannibal asked and Will looked away.

“It’s an appealing thought,” he confessed. “And I shouldn’t have told you. It gives you too much insight into how much I want you.”

“You acquired a bed for me,” Hannibal said, and his hands gripped Will’s upper legs from behind and pulled them further apart, so that Will’s hardening cock nestled against Hannibal’s. “And you accompanied me to the opera. From what I understand, these are significant gestures for you.”

“How embarrassing for me,” Will said and rubbed against Hannibal. He felt Hannibal's cock harden further and grinned. “Lucky for me, I’m sure that dressing down and greeting my dogs is a big gesture for you. But we should concentrate on something else now, don’t you think?”

Hannibal answered by grabbing his ass and pressing them even closer. The sudden friction when they moved against each other made Will shudder. He realized he was still wearing his glasses but he couldn’t be bothered to take them off. He let his hands wander over Hannibal’s chest and through the coarse hair. He gripped it to find a hold as their cocks rubbed against each other and listened to Hannibal’s breathing speeding up.

“Lubricant,” Hannibal said with a rough voice and Will forced himself to let go and reach for the lube in the drawers beside his bed. He struggled with the bottle in his hands, while Hannibal was distracting him by playing with his nipples. He had a hand on each and was rubbing and stroking them in turns. Light pain and pleasure mixed and made Will very uncoordinated.

“Stop it,” Will complained with shaking breath. To his surprise, Hannibal stopped and his hands gently stroked down Will’s sides. It tickled, Will laughed involuntarily and curled inwards. The bottle fell out of his hands to the bed and he dropped to Hannibal’s side, looking to Hannibal’s face and finding a satisfied smile on it.

Are you really feeling this? Will wondered. *I hope so, because it feels wonderful.*

“Allow me to help,” Hannibal said and opened the lube. He poured it onto Will’s open hands, put the bottle aside and as Will warmed the lube between his fingers, Hannibal moved him over his lap again. When Will thought the lube sufficiently warm, he aligned their hard cocks, suppressing a gasp as they touched, and spread the lube over and between them with his hands. Hannibal sighed, satisfied and when Will looked up he had his head tilted back against the mattress and his eyes were half closed. His hair was rumpled and in his eyes. Hannibal reached out and his warm hands joined Will’s around their cocks.
The touch of Hannibal’s smooth but calloused hands and the friction between them was

delicious. Soon Will was rutting uncontrollably trying to get more. Uncharacteristically Hannibal wasn't controlling their movements. He seemed as uninhibited as Will when he gripped their cocks hard and moved them fast. His face showed the pleasure he felt and it was mesmerizing for Will to watch it. When Hannibal came, he closed his eyes fully for the first time, threw his head back and groaned for a long moment. Will felt his come hit his stomach and his own cock and it was enough for him to orgasm too. Overwhelmed, he cried out as he came and let go of their cocks. Hannibal was still stroking them slowly but stilled and let them go as Will collapsed. Will's glasses were squashed between his head and Hannibal's chest. They were both breathing heavily.

"You are crying," Hannibal said, and touched Will's face. Will blinked and realized Hannibal was right.

"I'm okay," he said and arched into the touch as Hannibal lifted his glasses and swiped the tears from his face. "Just a bit dazed."

"Do you need to be alone?" Hannibal asked and Will was honestly surprised at the question. Nobody had ever asked him that and the old Hannibal would never have missed a chance to see him vulnerable.

"Maybe," he answered smiling. "But I don't want to be."

Hannibal nodded and pressed Will against his chest. He was quietly petting Will's hair and he wasn't talking or demanding anything. It gave Will time to let his body and mind come down from the rush of the orgasm and the intimacy. It gave him time to put back his barriers and remind himself he was Will Graham. And he liked dogs with their unconditional love, the silence surrounding his home, fishing in the river, the moment when someone released their last breath under his hands, and creating fishing lures from scratch.

"Well, there is nobody here but you now," Will said after a while when he felt settled in himself again.

"And you," Hannibal added.

"And me," Will confirmed.

They were lying peacefully and sated in bed and Will enjoyed being petted. After a few minutes Hannibal hummed and stretched under Will.

"I will need to check the casserole soon," he told Will.

"I thought it was good for 2 hours?" Will asked, frowning.

"It will be ready in about one hour but needs checking now," Hannibal said without emotion and Will looked up to him and smiled amused.

"Did you lie to get me into bed?" he asked and received a stern look in return. He didn't let it faze him.

“I did not mention the necessary monitoring during the cooking process,” Hannibal answered slowly.

“Uh-huh,” Will said and hid his face and his grin in Hannibal chest. He heard and felt it as the other man sighed. Will suppressed a laugh and kissed Hannibal’s skin.

“I’ll go and shower,” he said and slowly pushed himself up and away from Hannibal. They were a bit sticky and his thighs were burning a little from the exercise.

Will showered quickly. He was too excited to have Hannibal close by to stay away from him for too long. When he came out of the bathroom he wondered if he should put on fresh fancy clothes. Only twice had he eaten with Hannibal without being properly dressed. Will went to his dresser and stopped as he saw Hannibal had picked up and folded his own clothes. They were lying on Will’s dresser and Hannibal’s bag was still downstairs. Following his instincts, Will put on rarely used pajama bottoms and a t-shirt and went downstairs.

He found Hannibal in the kitchen, surrounded by Will’s dogs as he was checking the casserole. He had put on fresh clothes, which was a pity. For a few precious moments Will had expected him to cook naked, but he must have gotten some clothes from his overnight bag and washed himself in the downstairs bathroom.

“Now I’m feeling underdressed,” he said from the kitchen door. Hannibal finished his work and closed the oven again before he turned to Will. His eyes wandered over Will’s body and he smiled.

“I believe it can be overlooked as we are having an informal dinner,” he said.

Also, you like the easy access, Will thought and smiled satisfied with his own choice of clothing.

“Is the casserole okay?” he asked and Hannibal nodded.

“We will be able to eat in 50 to 60 minutes,” he answered.

Will felt too mellow to suggest any more talk about murder or cannibalism.

“Would you like to check if my piano is still in tune?” he asked and received a delighted look from Hannibal.

It was weird to sit down with Hannibal and play on Will’s little piano. There was barely space for both of them on its tiny wooden bench but Hannibal didn’t seem to care, so Will decided not to be embarrassed about it.

“Who taught you?” Hannibal asked after Will had finished playing a simple melody, rather stiffly.

“I taught myself,” Will answered. “I liked the idea of playing piano, so when I bought the

house, I picked up this old thing and some sheet music books and tutorials. You were taught professionally?"

"My uncle taught me," Hannibal replied and played a familiar sounding classical melody. "He adopted me after my parents died."

Will made himself stay calm and relaxed, hoping Hannibal would divulge more information. He wasn't disappointed.

"He hoped it would make me connect with him, but it became obvious very quickly that I needed a more experienced teacher than him."

"Did he find another way to connect with you?" Will asked, and Hannibal gave him an appraising look, while he kept playing.

"Yes," he said after a moment of just music. "He is an artist and taught me. He would have preferred me to paint like himself but I prefer the clear lines of drawings."

"Black and white, clear borders," Will said. Within his head he was seeing it clearly. A young Hannibal sketching reality as he saw it while his uncle tried him to get him to play with colors and let his fantasies roam freely.

"Buildings and anatomy," Will said, associating. "Did you ever show him your own designs?"

Hannibal stopped playing and Will felt himself wrenched out of his mental reconstruction of Hannibal's youth. To his relief, Hannibal was looking at him with reverence.

"My clever boy," Hannibal said and raised his hand to cup Will's face.

"Sorry," Will said and leaned against the hand. "I don't do it on purpose."

"You don't have to apologize," Hannibal told him in a firm voice. "I'm flattered you find me interesting enough to empathize with me so deeply."

He leaned in and softly kissed Will's mouth. "And if you keep apologizing, I will eventually tire of it, so you should consider using apologies sparingly."

"You won't tire of me," Will disagreed and kissed Hannibal back. "I'm too surprising."

"That you are," Hannibal agreed. "Shall we play some more?"

Will shook his head. "You play and I'll listen?"

"If you wish."

"I do wish," Will said and stayed beside Hannibal listening and enjoying the company. Briefly his mind drifted to a future after the fall from the cliff and a similar scene somewhere

in a house of Hannibal's, but he pushed the fantasy away. He had this Hannibal now and with every moment Will spent with him, he felt closer to him and more conjoined.

I will bind you to me, Will thought.

When Hannibal stopped playing Will was startled from his thoughts. Confused he looked at Hannibal and found him smiling at him.

"It's time," he said to Will. "The casserole will be ready in a few minutes."

Will set the table while Hannibal arranged the food to his satisfaction in the kitchen. It all felt startlingly familiar when he served the delicious looking meal.

"How long did you stay with your uncle?" Will asked as they were eating. The meat was delicious and it made him feel guilty. He needed a distraction and Hannibal had broached the topic and Will was very curious about Hannibal's past.

"My family died when I was eight years old, I spent some time in an orphanage until my uncle could be found," Hannibal said without much accentuation. "He had neither expected nor planned to be responsible for a child, but he and his wife looked after me during my adolescence."

Will smiled as he imagined a teenage Hannibal.

"Do you still see them?"

"My uncle's wife is Japanese, after I left for university, they moved from France to her home country," Hannibal explained.

It didn't answer Will's question but he let it go and didn't ask further. The idea of Hannibal having living family, apart from Chiyoh, was very alluring.

"My father died before I tried out for the FBI," he told Hannibal instead. It was only fair to share some of his own history. "We weren't close but I never knew my mother and he was always there, even when I didn't want him to be."

"He didn't understand your gift," Hannibal said without question.

Will smiled a bit sadly. "No, he would have preferred me to be normal. I learned not to bring attention to my differences."

"Was it cruelty or was he ingenuous?"

Will shook his head. "He never influenced me directly. I just empathized with him," he said quickly and was surprised over the strong emotions which arose within him.

You are never over your parents, Will thought.

“It was a bigger problem when I was younger. I would meet people and just start to understand them, speak like them and adapt to their needs. Now I know myself better, I have had enough time to know myself and be myself.”

“By yourself,” Hannibal added and Will huffed amused.

“That too,” he agreed.

They ended up in bed after eating dinner and letting the dogs out. Hannibal insisted he wanted to read Will’s book outline and Will gave in to the request and brought a printout of everything he had written for it. He curled up beside Hannibal and just enjoyed their closeness while Hannibal read the pages. It was nice in a domestic way and Will relaxed very quickly.

He woke up in the dark and pressed against Hannibal’s back. He was comfortable and warm and somewhat aroused without knowing why. He must have dreamed something, but he couldn’t remember what. Only that it had been nice. Will had a look at the clock and saw that it would be dawn soon. He untangled himself from Hannibal, slipped out of bed and went downstairs to look after the dogs. He let them out for a few minutes and wondered afterwards if he should get back into bed with Hannibal or start breakfast. With a smirk, Will decided to wake Hannibal. He would make breakfast. He was more qualified to do so, anyway.

Hannibal didn’t startle awake when Will slipped under the sheets and touched Hannibal’s legs with his cold feet. It would have surprised Will if Hannibal hadn’t woken when he’d left the bed before.

“So,” he said, hugging Hannibal close to his chest. “I considered eating some cereal, but decided to wake you instead, to avoid giving you a heart attack when you see me eating it.”

Hannibal laughed silently, and Will enjoyed seeing his face soft and open.

“I shall endeavor to offer you a more nutritious meal,” Hannibal said, with a voice deep from sleep.

“Good,” Will said smiling and let his hands roam over Hannibal’s chest. It was nice to have access to Hannibal’s body, nice to have the right to touch him.

But still, he felt a little foolish for his own enthusiasm. He wondered if Hannibal had a similar problem.

Maybe, Will decided. He was spending a lot of time with Will, after all, and he’d accepted his quirks. Hannibal wasn’t even trying to change him yet. *If you don’t count him trying to send a killer after me.*

“If you want breakfast, you will have to let me up, Will,” Hannibal said but made no effort to let go of Will. They were stroking each other and Will liked the touches very much.

“Breakfast, then sex?” Will asked after a minute of petting. He felt another silent chuckle

shake Hannibal.

“Nice to know I amuse you,” Will said without a smile and stroked over Hannibal’s erection through the fabric of his pajamas. He enjoyed hearing Hannibal’s breath quicken and was disappointed when his hand was taken up, brought to Hannibal’s lips and kissed.

“Let me feed you,” Hannibal said in a husky voice and his free hand gripped Will’s bottom gently. “Afterwards you can shower, and we can have as much sex as you like.”

“Good,” Will said breathless, and struggled out of Hannibal’s arms to kneel on the bed.

“I’m assuming you want me to shower again so we can … have penetrative sex?” he asked avoiding the word “fuck”. No talk of being “horny” with Hannibal. He would have to find other ways to express his wishes.

“If you want to,” Hannibal answered, and sat up too.

“Haven’t done that yet,” Will said. “You will have to show me.”

“It will be my pleasure,” Hannibal said.

They kissed and left the bed. Will felt giddy with anticipation and also silly for being so excited. Hannibal, of course, was very calm, at least on the outside. Will hoped he was a bit anticipatory inside.

After breakfast, Will went for a shower and cleaned himself out as well as he could. If he liked this, he decided to look up what the easiest way to prepare himself was. He probably should have done that before inviting Hannibal over.

Hannibal wasn’t in the bedroom when Will came from his shower, and he crawled naked into bed to wait.

“Have you been waiting long?” Hannibal asked from the door after a few minutes.

Years and years, Will thought and answered smiling: “My own fault, I hurried.”

Of course, Hannibal was a gentlemen and didn’t just get to it when he joined Will in bed. They kissed and moved against each other until Will had to stop it because it was too dry.

“Lube,” he said with swollen lips and watched as Hannibal procured some. It wasn’t the one from his bedside but from Hannibal’s overnight bag. He had also brought condoms and to Will’s surprise latex gloves with him. Will looked at the gloves with a frown.

“Am I correct that your association with latex gloves is work related?” Hannibal asked, unfazed.

“Yeah,” Will said. “Crime scenes, dead bodies and the lab.”

The gloves brought to mind hospital stays after being gutted, and Hannibal's hands when he force-fed him Abigail's ear. But he couldn't mention these reasons. Still, his erection had flagged. Hannibal had noticed but ignored it and pulled on one glove.

"Let me give you some more pleasurable feelings about them," he requested and waited until Will nodded before he poured lube on the gloved hand and moved it between his fingers. Will watched, interested.

"You can lie down and place a pillow under yourself," Hannibal said. "Or you lie on your side or…"

"Or I could go on my hand and knees," Will added. He thought about it but it was hard to decide. In the end, he went on his hand and knees because it gave him the best ability to move. It was disconcerting not being able to see Hannibal though. Will frowned when Hannibal started to stroke over Will's hole with slick gloved fingers. It felt clinical, a bit like a prostate examination. Will chuckled at the thought and Hannibal's hand stilled.

"Sorry," Will said and turned his head to Hannibal, who was looking questioning at him. "I just thought… well…"

It will sound silly, Will berated himself and hesitated before he decided to go with it.

"Is this really how a prostate exam should go, Dr. Lecter?" he asked looking over his shoulder and got rewarded with a smile.

"Absolutely, Mr. Graham," Hannibal answered and patted Will's butt with the ungloved hand before he continued stroking Will's opening from the outside. Will turned back around and let his head drop down.

"So, you do this with every patient of yours?" he asked playfully. It was a good distraction from the preparation.

"As you know I don't practice medicine anymore," Hannibal answered and pushed his index finger into Will up to the first knuckle. Will resisted at first and had to consciously relax.

"So, this house visit is an exception, Dr. Lecter?" he asked and took a deep breath as Hannibal moved his finger in and out.

"Absolutely," Hannibal stated firmly. He pulled his finger out, and Will heard him add more lube before he penetrated him again, deeper this time. He hadn't found it very arousing up until that moment, but now it started to feel good. He was opening up for Hannibal. He couldn't do it mentally yet, so offering his body was a good substitute.

"I'm glad to hear it, because I think this examination is a little too friendly for you to keep your license," Will said and closed his eyes. "Or to keep your partner, should you do this with someone else."

His movements changed rhythm slightly at Will's last sentence and Will smiled smugly.

Hannibal's free hand touched his lower back and Will shuddered at the warmth which radiated from Hannibal as he stroked over his skin.

"Then I shall not engage with anyone other than my partner," Hannibal said and Will heard him move before he placed a kiss on his spine.

"Time to add another finger?" Will deflected, the moment was suddenly too intense.

"Yes," Hannibal answered.

A second finger was added without them speaking. Will felt relaxed and started to like the stretch.

"Having trouble finding my prostate, Dr. Lecter," he asked teasingly but with a rough voice. Hannibal's answer was a sudden assault on his prostate which made Will struggle for breath from the feelings of exquisite pleasure.

"Okay, okay, you got it," Will said breathing hard but Hannibal didn't stop stimulating him. Will groaned, bent his arms and dropped his head on the bed, pressing his face against the sheet.

"Did you know, Mr. Graham, that regular prostate massages have proven to decrease the risk of prostate cancer?"

Will rolled his eyes, partially because of Hannibal staying in the role but mostly because he felt very good.

"I'm…," Will started. "I'm not…"

He groaned as Hannibal took out the two fingers and heard lube being applied again.

"I'm actually not that much into roleplay," he said using the short respite before Hannibal entered him with three fingers. The stretch added a sharp edge of pleasure-pain to the arousal and Will moaned.

"And you are relaxed enough now not to need a distraction," Hannibal said. His voice was affectionate and Will imagined Hannibal smiling down at him. Will Graham, empath and FBI profiler, pierced on his fingers, it must be a treat for him. *So open and vulnerable for him and trusting him with his body and his life. Calling him partner and tying himself to Hannibal with his words. It was intoxicating to have Will in this way. It would be even more alluring to have Will's mind open for Hannibal, so Will could let go of the boundaries he had placed for himself and become the magnificent being that was hiding inside. Beautiful Will…*

"Will? Will?" he heard Hannibal say and Will recognized that he was lying on his side and Hannibal was spooning him from behind. His gloved hand was resting sticky on Will's stomach and their legs were entwined. Hannibal's chest was pressed against Will's back.

"Where did you go?" Hannibal asked and Will knew he had spoken at least some of his

insights out loud and Hannibal had heard him.

“Inside your head,” Will answered honestly just to follow it up with a question filled with pretense. “What do you want me to become?”

Will waited patiently while Hannibal considered before he answered: “I believe, you have a great potential,” (*for violence*, Will thought), “with your gift, that you are not using completely as you are afraid to lose yourself.”

“As I just did,” Will said, without pause. Internally he was amused.

“As you just did,” Hannibal confirmed. “Your insights just now were impressive. Does it offend you that I wish you would use your gift more extensively?”

“It’s not offensive, more flattering,” Will answered, he would let it go for now if Hannibal would too. He saw the condoms lying on the bed and took one to hand it to Hannibal over his shoulder.

“I think, you wanted to be inside me, didn’t you?” he asked.

“If you want me to,” Hannibal whispered close to his ear. He took the condom as Will nodded and they struggled for a moment with the logistics, neither wanting to let go of the other. Hannibal had to distance himself for a moment to take off the glove and put on the condom.

“Like this?” he asked Will as he spooned him again. Will felt his erection and the latex of the condom against his ass.

“Will it work?” he asked back, not having the experience.

“It will be slow,” Hannibal said and moved Will’s upper leg forward. “I won’t be able to hit your prostate very accurately.”

“You will have to control yourself, so you won’t leave me behind,” Will said, challenging.

“I will,” Hannibal said and added: “Please hand me the lube?”

Will reached for it with a smile for hearing such prosaic words from Hannibal and a few moments of preparation later Hannibal’s cock was pushing into him. He felt stretched but it didn’t burn thanks to Hannibal’s generous application of lube. And as Hannibal had warned him he wasn’t hitting Will’s prostate with every push.

Still, Will found it arousing to hear Hannibal’s quicker breathing, to feel his hard cock inside and to have his right hand hold onto Will’s waist. And it was delicious when Hannibal found the right angle and Will couldn’t help but groan or whimper every time it happened.

“Touch me, please?” he begged when the build-up got too much for him and Hannibal reacted by taking Will’s cock in his hand. He controlled the pace and Will found himself

curse him under his breath, which caused an amused chuckle in his ear.

“Patience,” Hannibal said and nipped at Will’s earlobe.

But he sped up the movements and Will felt himself coming closer to orgasm, until Hannibal suddenly let go of Will’s cock just to grip the base of it and stop Will from coming.

“Fuck!” Will shouted and thrashed out from under Hannibal’s controlling touch. He panted and cursed inaudibly while he came down from near-orgasm.

“Did you want to leave me behind, Will?” Hannibal asked, sounding way too controlled, and Will snarled. He pulled himself away from Hannibal, not liking the loss of Hannibal’s cock leaving his ass but also being angry enough to do it. He turned and pushed Hannibal on his back before he climbed on him while baring his teeth. Hannibal looked at him admiringly and it didn’t make Will calm down a bit.

“This what you want?” he asked and stroked Hannibal’s chest upwards until he reached his throat. He wrapped his hands around Hannibal’s throat and watched with wide eyes as Hannibal arched backwards to give Will’s hands more room.

Will groaned at the sight and leaned forward and kissed Hannibal using his teeth. When they separated, he let go of Hannibal’s throat and skimmed backwards to lead Hannibal’s cock back into himself. Hannibal took hold of his waist and they were moving in a hectic rhythm. Will decided this was a better position altogether. His prostate got a lot more attention and more importantly he could see Hannibal’s face. And what a sight Hannibal was. He lay under Will with an open mouth, breathing hard and unable to take his eyes off Will. They were moving in sync and Will stroked his cock as he fucked himself on Hannibal. He could feel his orgasm nearing.

“Please come with me,” Will breathed harshly.

“Yes,” Hannibal said breathlessly. He looked utterly debauched and out of control and the thought of having done that to Hannibal was all Will needed to come over Hannibal’s stomach.

“Please, please,” Will begged as Hannibal kept pushing into him twice and thrice and then Hannibal came with a barely audible moan and his eyes fluttered shut.

Will looked down at him smiling and leaned forward to kiss Hannibal’s eyelids. Hannibal’s cock slipped out of Will and he lay down beside him.

They didn’t speak and Hannibal kept his eyes closed.

Reconstructing his mask, Will mused and kissed the corner of his lips.

“Do you feel good?” he asked Hannibal with a low voice.

“Yes,” Hannibal said but didn’t open his eyes.

“Take a moment, okay? I’ll get a cloth to clean us up,” Will said and kissed him on the lips.

He stood up, his legs feeling weak, and left for the bathroom. Will cleaned himself and went back with a warm washcloth and a towel. To Will’s surprise, Hannibal was still lying on the bed with closed eyes, and he hurried to take the condom off and clean Hannibal’s cock before he took care of the mess on his stomach.

When Will looked up, he saw that Hannibal was watching him. Will wondered if Hannibal had really lost his control there for a moment and let the towel and cloth fall to the floor as he crawled into bed and pulled the blanket over them. He buried himself into Hannibal’s side and Hannibal embraced him wordlessly, pressing his face against Will’s hair, nuzzling him.

“You make me feel very transparent,” Hannibal said.

“You said I should use apologies sparingly,” Will replied. He breathed slowly and deeply, willing himself to stay relaxed and not tense up.

“No apology is needed,” Hannibal said. “I’m merely explaining why I’m unsettled and intrigued at the same time.”

Will thought for a moment that he should push Hannibal to open up more, but he felt that they had both had enough openness for the day. They needed some respite.

“What did you think of the book outline?” he asked instead.

“I believe you are no longer interested in writing it,” Hannibal said.

Will blinked and looked up to see Hannibal’s face. His expression was warm and attentive. “Can you explain your reasoning?” he asked Hannibal.

“The beginning is very promising but rather quickly it becomes theoretical and it feels like you have become intellectually weary of your own writing. Compared to your article about empathy, it is a poor shadow.”

Will thought about it frowning and staring at Hannibal’s chest instead of his face. He wasn’t very attached to the book, so he didn’t feel offended. Will remembered how he had started the book to attract Hannibal’s interest, which he had now without it.

“Have you considered your interest in the topic came from your underlying assumptions about the Chesapeake Ripper’s cannibalism?” Hannibal asked very innocently and Will had to bite the inside of his lips not to snort.

“Maybe,” Will said slowly. “Now that you said it, yes. I haven’t been very enthusiastic about it for a while now.”

“I have a suggestion which could be helpful,” Hannibal offered and Will looked up.

“Go on,” he told him.

“Use what you have written so far to argue for your theory about the Ripper.”

“And see if that leads me to a conclusion. You think I was just exploring possible paths when I was playing with the book,” Will said understanding. “I can do that, thank you.”

“You are welcome,” Hannibal answered.

Lying sated and satisfied in bed, Will wondered how they would spent the day. They had nothing urgent to do apart from looking after the dogs. And Hannibal could stay the whole day. Will couldn’t remember spending such a long time with Hannibal without having anything planned.

“How do you spend your free days?” he asked Hannibal and gazed at him while leaning on his elbow.

“I’m rarely idle,” Hannibal answered. “I have a wide circle of acquaintances and interests that consume my time.”

“Tell me,” Will asked and placed his hand on Hannibal’s chest to play with the hair there.

“About my acquaintances?” Hannibal asked in a teasing tone and Will pulled a face.

“No,” he said. “Your interests.”

He knew of course, but he wanted to hear Hannibal tell him. To his delight, Hannibal did and Will laid his head on Hannibal’s chest and listened to him speak about calligraphy, acquiring ingredients, decorating his dining room, and going to art exhibitions and concerts and operas.

Will heard the lies and the truths and was amazed at how well they blended to a more or less honest picture of most of Hannibal’s interests. It made him smile and it also made him sad, as he knew Hannibal was hiding parts of himself from Will. He didn’t like it and he could understand his Hannibal’s need to pull Will into the dark when they met during the Hobbs case better now. It was hard to love someone without being able to be honest with them.

“I want to go to your expensive food stores with you,” he said when Hannibal paused his descriptions. “although I might become enraged at the prices.”

“It would be my pleasure to take you,” Hannibal said solemnly. “Why would you be enraged?”

“I told you that we were poor when I was growing up,” Will reminded him. “I followed my father from job to job, and in between there were times when money and food was not plentiful. Did you ever go hungry as a child?”

Hannibal was silent for a long time and when he finally spoke Will didn’t dare to look up. Hannibal’s voice was distant.

“The winter my parents died was very harsh. We lived in the countryside and while my family was wealthy, most of our assets were not available to us during the Soviet occupation of Lithuania. The estate was falling to ruins and food was scarce. We lived from the land and it wasn’t always kind.”

Hannibal’s accent had become more pronounced as he spoke and Will took his hand and held it. His memories of Lecter Vargas and Hannibal’s words had woven a vivid picture of Hannibal’s childhood in Will’s mind. And he knew death and loss were lurking at the end of the story, and following the loss of his family was time in an orphanage. Will didn’t dare to touch on these topics, so he went with the food.

“You know hunger,” he said and kissed Hannibal’s hand to reassure and ground him. “And you indulge where I, on the other hand, am more careful with my money so I will never go without food again.”

Hannibal looked at him and Will could feel that he was pulling himself away from the past he rarely delved into.

“I have the advantage of becoming wealthy when I left my home country and started living with my uncle,” Hannibal said and looked thoughtfully at Will. “You have money now but you do not spend it.”

“No,” Will confirmed. “Spending money on luxuries feels decadent.”

“But you liked when I was spending money on you,” Hannibal said nearly purring. Will looked away.

“I liked it,” he said feeling embarrassed, “because you took an interest in me. And also because it felt possessive, similarly to when you bit me.”

“Do you need me to take care of you?” Hannibal asked and Will shook his head immediately.

“No,” he said emphatically. “But it’s nice that you would. If I needed or wanted it. Does that make sense?”

Hannibal hummed in thought. “Yes. I confess the thought of you taking care of me if I was in need is pleasing to me too.”

“We’ll take care of each other then,” Will said with a warm smile. He liked that, it felt like a promise.

“We will,” Hannibal repeated with a small smile.

They went for a walk later and took the dogs with them. Hannibal had brought some sturdier shoes and Will choose a path that which partially paved to save his clothes.

“I have to take you fishing,” he told Hannibal.

“Do you sit beside the river?” Hannibal asked.

“No,” Will answered. “I walk into the stream and stand in the water until I catch my fish. I’m persistent like that. But you can sit beside the river and watch me if you want.”

“To my surprise, I find the idea appealing,” Hannibal said and Will laughed at the honesty.

“As appealing as I find the opera?” he asked.

“I would like to watch you in your natural element, Will.”

“I wasn’t born in the river, Hannibal,” Will teased and it earned him a smile.

They spent the rest of the day being idle after Hannibal cooked them an opulent lunch. When Hannibal left in the early evening, Will didn’t want to let him go. He held on to Hannibal and kissed him until Hannibal pushed him away, breathing heavily.

“I do have to leave, Will,” he said and smoothed over his clothes.

“Just giving you something to think about on your way home,” Will replied, grinning.

“I shall think about when we can meet again,” Hannibal said.

“When can we meet again?” Will asked.

“I have to leave next weekend for a conference,” Hannibal said. “But I’m free on Thursday evening if you want to join me.”

“Of course I want to,” Will answered without thinking and they smiled at each other.

“I shall plan a meal for two,” Hannibal replied.

Will waited in the doorway until the Bentley was gone. His house felt empty when he returned to his living room. The dogs were lounging around, and Will went to their dog beds and took some time to pet and cuddle them.

“You have behaved very well,” he told them and enjoyed their simple adoration and love. They helped him calm down and ground himself and he laid down, closed his eyes and let them cuddle up to him.

Clacking heels startled Will. His eyes snapped open and he saw Bedelia dismissively look down at him.

“I really don’t need you, Bedelia,” he said shortly. Her mere presence disturbed him after playing house with Hannibal for so long.

“Your subconscious disagrees,” she answered and Will stood up, not wanting her to be above him. He walked away from her, trying to create distance but she followed him and sat down in one of his armchairs. Will looked at the other armchair with twitching fingers. He was caught between sitting down and listening or checking if his hallucination of Bedelia could be strangled.

But as his hallucinated Hannibal had not able to kiss, Will decided to sit down and listen. She was here and there was no reason to be jealous of her anymore, he told himself. He had Hannibal now and he would make sure the real Bedelia would never get as close to Hannibal as the old one had.

“Fine,” he said and crossed his legs. “What do you want?”

“Is it nice?” she asked and Will frowned.

“Being with him?” she said and Will just stared at her while she stared back.

She looked away first and Will raised his head in satisfaction.

“I enjoyed our time in Italy,” she said looking to the window and slowly moved a loose strand of hair back into form with the rest. “I knew he was killing and I didn’t mind that much at first.”

“You were afraid of being caught,” Will snapped.

“Are you not?”, Bedelia asked. “You would lose your little house and your dogs and your few friends. You would be imprisoned again and this time you would deserve it.”

Will remembered being set free by Hannibal, he remembered dislocating his thumb to escape his handcuffs and he remembered shots being fired and driving away in a police car.

“I’m not afraid of being caught,” he said. There were ways out of prison and he felt sure he would find them if necessary. “But I’m also confident that I will not get caught.”

“Because of your knowledge of the future?” she asked with a raised eyebrow. “Is it still useful to know what could have happened? Relationships and events have changed; you cannot trust your memories to come to pass.”

Will shrugged his shoulders.

“I still have an advantage. I know people better than I should, and I’m not Hannibal, but I can predict some outcomes.”

She huffed nearly inaudibly and Will glared at her.

“What do you predict?” she asked. “Will Hannibal be delighted when he finds out you are the predator in his territory; the one who is taunting him and who killed one of his protégés?”

Will wanted to dismiss her, but it was a concern. He was sure Hannibal was enthralled by him, but he had been courting him and been in love with him before and he had still been set on eating Will's brain.

"Hannibal can be vain. The longer you wait, the more betrayed he will feel."

"Is this relationship therapy, Bedelia?" Will couldn't resist snapping. She enraged him like few other people because she could see him as he didn't want to be seen. His pettiness and jealousy were as clear to her as his love for Hannibal.

"Do you need advice on your relationship?" she asked slowly pronouncing her words.

My relationship is fine, he wanted to snap; but of course it wasn't. It was a dream and soon he would wake. Hannibal knowing he had been played was dangerous, and Will would need a plan to ensure he survived.

"What's your suggestion? Go to his house for our next meeting and tell him 'Oh, by the way, I know you are the Chesapeake Ripper and I have been leaving bodies to gain your attention. But as we have shacked up now, I thought I'd stop.' That would go down well," he told her with a sneer on his face.

"Fear makes you rude," she told him with an angry and thin smile and Will gripped the armrests hard. She was right, he was afraid. He was certain Hannibal was enamored with him and at this point his alter ego as the Ripper's admirer was a distraction from Will.

"Rudeness would be another thing which could get me killed," he said and took a deep breath to relax himself. It was the closest he could get to an agreement with Bedelia. Being antagonistic wouldn't help. She wasn't really Bedelia and he was just being bitchy with himself.

"In the past you remember Hannibal has often overlooked your rudeness," Bedelia said focusing on Will's face. "But you cannot assume it will be the same now."

"No," he agreed with tight lips. "I cannot."

It was hard to say it after the time he just spent with Hannibal. It was hard to remember Hannibal feigning many emotions. Just as Hannibal had never been able to entirely predict Will, Will had never been able to completely understand Hannibal. Hannibal had loved him as he gutted him, he had loved him as he tried to eat his brain and Will couldn't count on this time's Hannibal just accepting him and the game he had played.

"The roles are reversed," he realized aloud and smiled. "The first time we met, Hannibal saw potential in me and persuaded me until… I found him in the dark. Now, I see his potential and I suffer like… he must have suffered."

"How does that make you feel?"

Will huffed. “I understand Hannibal better than before. At least my Hannibal, the one from the past or future… whatever. The Hannibal from the events only I remember.”

He looked away from her, not able to say the next words while holding eye contact.

“But I worry this understanding causes me to project onto this Hannibal. I can’t afford to underestimate him or to idealize what we have.”

“You need to lift the veil,” she said.

“Crack it open,” he said nodding and thought about surprising Hannibal. He had done it before, but this time he cared about the outcome. How to surprise Hannibal and show him he wasn’t a threat was the question.

“I need to declare my loyalty and… love in a way he recognizes.”

Bedelia didn’t answer. As Will looked back to her, she was gone and the chair was empty.

“Damnit,” Will cursed and the dogs looked up at his outburst. Now he wanted her opinion and help, she was gone. “Typical.”

Will tried not to think too much about his plans and options and took the dogs out to distract himself. He watched them play with each other but he still felt nervous and when they were back inside he called the man who wanted to adopt a new dog. The conversation was painful for Will but he agreed to meet and bring Marvin and Buster to see if they would get along. When he went to bed it smelled of Hannibal. The smell relaxed him more than it should. He buried his face in the sheets and fell asleep.

The week started with a boring Monday and on Tuesday Will had an enraged student who wasn’t happy with the mark Will had given him. Will went through the rest of his classes with an uneasy feeling. Afterwards he decided to visit the lab. If he was honest with himself it wasn’t because he was needed to, but because he wanted to see Beverly, Price and Zeller for a few minutes which was a weird thing for him to want. He decided to go anyway because it would make him look more normal if he bitched about the troublesome trainee to his colleagues. Normal people complained about people to their friends and colleagues.

The lab was empty when he arrived with his stuff and frowning, Will looked around and then asked a bypassing agent. He was directed to Jack’s office and when he arrived he heard Zeller and Beverly talking loudly through the partially open door. When he raised his hand to knock he heard Jack say: “We will check this out, it’s our job to do it, no matter how we feel about him. Get on it!”

Will stepped back and let his raised hand fall. He heard people move inside the office and tried to clear his face of emotions.

Hannibal greeting the dogs, Will reminded himself and with the memory of Hannibal kneeling down to greet his pack in the forefront of his mind he was able to smile shyly at

Price, who opened the door fully and stopped in his tracks when he saw Will.

“Hey,” Will said as a greeting and saw the guilt on Zeller’s face behind Price. Beverly’s face was a stoic mask when she saw him. Something was wrong, and Will felt the adrenalin rush through him as his fight or flight reflex kicked in.

“Will,” Price said, and Will heard a chair move from within the room.

“I wanted to ask if there are any news and if you guys want to get a coffee?” he asked. Zeller had put on a false smile and Beverly was looking back to Jack, who arrived behind them a moment later.

“Will, come in, please,” he said jovially and then to the others: “You have something to do.”

Will made himself relax as much as he was able as he stepped into the room after the others had vacated it.

“They seemed stressed?” he remarked to Jack as he sat down in front of his chair. Luckily, he had a reputation for not looking into people’s eyes, because right now, he wouldn’t be able to look into Jack’s.

“I gave them a difficult task,” Jack said without much intonation. “They are professional agents of the FBI, they will cope.”

“Okay,” Will said slowly. “And can I help you?”

“I just wanted to ask the same,” Jack replied. “What are you doing here?”

If Jack suspected him in any way, he needed to appear innocent and not like he was getting involved in the investigation more than he was supposed to.

Will couldn’t blush on demand but he thought about all the sex acts he had performed with Hannibal at the weekend to appear a bit flushed before he answered.

“I… um… I wanted to ask Beverly for a coffee. My day was a bit crap, sorry, I didn’t know you needed her here.” He said it all in a rush and glancing upwards at Jack for a split second at the end. He looked honestly pitying and Will was torn between relief and anger at the attitude.

“Beverly, Zeller and Price will be working on a special project for the next few days. One you are not cleared for, so I must ask you not to interrupt them.”

Will nodded frowning.

“Anything to do with the Ripper?” he asked with a bit of eagerness. “Did Hannibal and my profiles bring something to light?”

“As I said you are not cleared for it,” Jack answered and added a little sharp: “You insisted on

consulting only, so we can't involve you in everything."

"Yes, sorry," Will said and let his shoulders fall. "I shouldn't push, it's just that the Ripper is frustrating me. You know the feeling."

Jack nodded with a sigh.

"How are the trainees doing?" he asked in a sudden change of topic.

Will grimaced honestly at the question remembering the pushy student.

"Let's just say that I'm happy it's exam time soon and that I'm looking forward to reduced hours for the next rotation," Will answered truthfully.

"You are reducing your teaching hours?" Jack asked surprised.

"Yes, I need some time for other things," Will answered and watched a frown darken Jack's face.

"Like Dr. Lecter?" Jack asked.

"Actually I met Hannibal after I spoke with human resources about reducing my hours. But having more time for him will be great."

Jack nodded in very small movements that signaled skepticism to Will. Annoyed, Will decided to go for a low blow.

"Don't you wish sometimes that you had more time with your wife?" Will asked with a hopefully soft smile. "I really enjoy spending time with Hannibal and we live a long distance apart. It will be nice to spend less time at work."

"I hope you are not letting him influence you," Jack remarked.

Will blinked and then frowned.

"What do you mean?"

Jack looked away and Will got the feeling he had said more than he wanted.

"New relationships can be overwhelming," Jack said evasively. Will suppressed the urge to roll his eyes at that.

"I'm not so crazy that I can't have a relationship without losing myself," Will said irritated. He had been married for years, but of course Jack didn't know that. It hadn't happened for this Jack.

"Of course not," Jack said and made an appeasing movement with his hands.

“So, if I’m not cleared for the current case, you will call me in when something comes up with the Ripper or the Admirer?” Will asked.

Jack nodded.

When Will left the office he felt his calm slip away.

Hannibal, he thought frantically. They suspected Hannibal.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

After the fall, Will woke up 9 months before he first met Hannibal.
Before Will met Hannibal again and they became a couple, he, unknowingly to Hannibal, tried to gain the Ripper's attention by staging kills as an admirer. Unfortunately, this seems to have brought Hannibal on the FBI's radar.

Chapter Notes

Dear readers, you have been amazing! Thank you so much for the ride, I hope you enjoyed it too! Here are now the last chapter and the epilogue of “We Killed a Dragon Last Night”.

As many of you have remarked, I try to stay as close to canon as possible. I hope the end of this story will surprise as much as each season final has.

I’m very grateful for my betas: shanebarry17 and obermietze. Thank you so much for all your help! All remaining errors are mine.

Will sat in his car in the parking lot for a long time, staring at the building while his hands were shaking. Somehow his changes had lead Jack to Hannibal. He wanted to tell himself he was imagining it, but Will had experienced this kind of secrecy from Jack before. They had both behaved like this with Alana when she dated Hannibal.

They couldn’t have evidence yet, he thought. Otherwise Hannibal would have already been arrested. But they suspected, and right now they were probably checking timelines and alibis and Hannibal didn’t know and couldn’t protect himself.

Save yourself, kill them all, Will remembered and gripped the steering wheel. If he told Hannibal it would end in a blood bath. As annoying as Jack was, Will didn’t want to get him killed, or see any of the team die. He wanted to find out what they had on Hannibal and he needed to get him off the suspect list. And for that he would need a distraction for the team so he could get access to the lab and Jack’s office. His original plan to retire the Ripper’s admirer would have to wait now, he needed to protect Hannibal first.

He didn’t sleep a lot that night and mostly plotted what he would do the next day. When he

finally went to bed he kept waking up drenched in sweat. It reminded him of the encephalitis and he got up before dawn to take his own temperature. To his relief, it was within the normal range. He drank a lot of coffee, drove to Washington and lost himself in the crowd so he could use a burner phone to text Freddy Lounds the location of James Gray's mural. He mentioned that she should take the FBI with her as the killer was still alive. Afterwards he disassembled the phone and spent an hour on public transport, dropping the pieces in different parts of the city. The last thing he covered was creating an alibi for being in the city. He bought a bottle of Bâtard-Montrachet in a very expensive looking shop under the eyes of a rather skeptical looking shop owner.

Back in his car in the parking lot, Will felt relief at being out of the crowd. He kept his real phone switched off until he was enroute back to Quantico. When he turned it on there were no missed calls or messages. It could mean anything, like him being excluded from the investigations. Or Freddy had been stupid enough to go alone. Maybe she hadn't even seen his message yet. He would find out in time, but he hated not knowing and having to wait.

Will told himself to relax and conducted his lessons. During the breaks, he made himself stay in his lecture hall. He couldn't break from his routine, especially as he wasn't supposed to go to the lab. In the break before his last lesson he heard what he had hoped for; whispered conversations between the trainees. Something big has been discovered and Jack's team was gone. They wondered why Will was not with them. Will suppressed a smile and did his last lesson in a cheery mood. The students looked a little baffled when they left.

The lab was too exposed but Jack's office wasn't as exposed to casual visitors. Will sneaked into the office unnoticed. After some digging around and some amateurish lock-picking he found a file on Hannibal. They hadn't found Il Mostro yet but they had the connection to Randall Tier and found Bedelia's dead patient and half a dozen other conspicuous deaths surrounding Hannibal. They had also made a connection to the delivery man from the mirror factory and two more Ripper kills. This wasn't good and Will's heart raced. There was also file on himself but he calmed down when he didn't see any suspicious notes. On file, at least, Will looked very clean.

He left Jack's office with more knowledge, but also worried. Jack had done his background check more thoroughly this time and while no evidence was found, there was strong suspicion. It might be enough to get a search warrant if they presented it to a friendly judge.

Nothing will happen in the next few days, Will told himself as he reached his car. They would be really busy with the muralist. Hannibal would leave on Friday for his conference after their evening together. Will had a chance to protect him.

He fretted the whole way home and kept hearing the old Hannibal saying he worried too much and should relax with himself. It didn't help. He wanted to get drunk; no, he wanted to go to Hannibal and… Will sighed and started to breathe deeply. It wasn't Hannibal who pulled the strings, it was him and he had the responsibility. He had fucked up and Hannibal was in danger now. It was his job to make sure they got out of it.

Back at home, Will took Buster and Marvin to meet the potential new owner at his house. His head and heart weren't in it, but the dogs got along with the man and Will already knew him and trusted him with dogs. When they left, the man told Will he only wanted Marvin as two dogs would be too much for him and they agreed on a day for Marvin to go to him.
Will drove home and felt very highly-strung. The dogs picked up on his mood and he didn't think too long about taking all four of them into his bed for the night. It only smelled a little like Hannibal now.

In the morning, he called Jack and told him he had heard about the crime scene. He asked if he could help. Jack was silent on the other end and Will heard him sigh before he answered.

"No, right now I can't involve you, Will", he answered and Will knew he had to pretend to be hurt and insulted but he could only help but feel satisfaction at Jack following the behavioral patterns Will had predicted.

"Alright, let me know if things change," he told Jack, making himself sound pissed off.

"As soon as I can, Will," Jack promised and they said short goodbyes.

Will dragged himself through the daily routine and in the late afternoon headed to Baltimore to meet Hannibal.

Hannibal's house was alight when he arrived and Will took his wine bottle with him when he walked up to the door. Hannibal opened the door a few moments after Will had rang the bell. He gave him a wide and open smile and Will couldn't help but reply in kind.

"Hello Will," Hannibal said and Will stepped into the house and into Hannibal's arms. They hugged, which surprised Will as he would have expected a kiss, but hugging was good too, and Will held onto Hannibal with all his strength.

"Is everything alright?" Hannibal asked as they let go of each other. Will couldn't look into his eyes.

They know, he thought, caught up in the memory.

Hannibal closed the door and stood beside Will again.

"I brought you some wine," Will said before Hannibal could ask anything more. Hannibal took the bottle and his eyebrows rose at the label.

"Bâtard-Montrachet," Hannibal said, pleased. "An unexpected treat."

Will smiled and took off his coat. Hannibal put the bottle on a side table and took Will's coat from him.

"It's a good wine?" Will asked.

“A very good wine,” Hannibal confirmed as he put Will’s coat away. “Have you never tasted it?”

Will shook his head.

“Will it fit your planned meal?” he asked Hannibal.

Hannibal smiled and lead them to the kitchen.

“Unfortunately, it fits better with fish than the venison meal I have prepared,” he answered.

“It will keep,” Will said with a shrug. He went to the chair in the corner. As he turned around to sit, his eyes met Hannibal’s. Will froze.

“Forgive me for being forward, Will,” Hannibal said. “But you seem distraught. May I offer you an open ear?”

Will’s eyes flickered to the place where Abigail had died and he sat down, swallowing hard.

“It was a long week,” he said. He had prepared for this, knowing how well Hannibal could read him when he was upset. “Let me settle for a moment. Can I sit here and watch you do your magic for a while?”

Hannibal smiled at Will’s choice of words.

“Of course,” he answered. “Can I offer you something to drink?”

“Yes, please,” Will said and sunk into the armchair. “Surprise me?”

He brought Will a whiskey, it was delicious. Will had to stop himself from slugging the whole glass down.

“Brilliant,” he told Hannibal after he put the glass on the side table to remove temptation. Hannibal was working on decorating plates. The oven was on and it smelled like meat and strong herbs. It was so familiar and domestic that Will could nearly make himself forget the meat in the oven was most likely human.

“How was your week so far?” he asked to gain some more time and insight.

Hannibal put the plates down and looked at Will. He smiled.

“Something curious happened this week,” he said and placed a pan on the stove. “Jack wished to meet me and he came to my office.”

Will froze as the layout of Hannibal’s office came abruptly to his mind. The same layout Will had used for setting up Clark Ingram’s body. Oh, he had fucked up so much.

“I had expected a discussion about the profiles or, I believe the common wording is a ‘shovel talk’?”

Will, still shaken, made himself smile as he answered.

“Jack isn’t my Dad, Alana would be more likely for a talk like that. What did he really want?”

“He explained that for the time being the investigation is closed to any outside consultant,” Hannibal answered in a light tone. Will was sure he didn’t feel as light. Hannibal had good instincts and Jack’s sudden withdrawal from their cooperation must have made him apprehensive.

“Was that Monday?” Will asked as innocently as he could.

“Yes, the meeting was on Monday afternoon,” Hannibal confirmed and checked the oven. Will stayed relaxed as he was sure Hannibal would check his posture in the mirroring surface of the oven door.

“Fits,” he said, letting some annoyance slip into his tone. “I got frozen out on Tuesday.”

Will sighed and took up his glass as Hannibal turned around with an astonished look on his face.
Will shrugged.

“I’m not sure why either but Jack said they have an investigation which I can’t be involved with as a consultant. I’m not even sure if it’s connected to the Ripper and the Admirer. It could be an internal issue.”

He sipped from his glass before he continued.

“But it’s good to know you got kicked out too, otherwise I would think it’s about me. Maybe Jack got in trouble over having too many consultants and going over budget?”

“Nevertheless, you are stressed,” Hannibal said, watching Will closely.

Will shrugged again.

“I feel hurt, but I shouldn’t,” he answered. “I didn’t really want to do this work. Jack talked me into it and I did my best. I got nightmares and a dead body that looks like me for my trouble, and now Jack freezes me out.”

Will stopped, realizing that his voice had risen as he spoke.

“You are angry,” Hannibal stated, and Will sighed.

“Yes,” he said. “Are you?”

Hannibal's eyebrows raised in wonderment at the question.

"I was confused at first but knowing you have been sidelined too shines a new light on the situation," Hannibal answered in a light tone.

"You thought it was about you and now you don't," Will said and smiled sheepishly. "We should have just phoned each other."

Hannibal smiled warmly. "Yes, it would have meant less second guessing on both our parts."

"Let's do that in the future," Will said. Knowing that for Hannibal the situation wasn't resolved, he would still be suspicious. "Call each other when we are in doubt instead of brooding on our own."

Hannibal nodded and a timer beeped and made Hannibal spring into motion to open the oven door. Will watched him as he took out the meat.

"I wanted to ask," he started as he watched Hannibal, "do you need someone to look after your herbs while you are gone? Because I could do that if you wanted me to."

"A very generous offer," Hannibal answered. "But it won't be necessary. I will be leaving tomorrow morning and shall return on Sunday after only two nights. My herbs are on a watering system that needs little human input."

Will stored the information in the back of his mind for later and asked about the conference and the plans Hannibal had. He was continuously sipping his whiskey while they were in the kitchen and as they came into the dining room, wine awaited him.

"Are you trying to get me drunk?" he asked.

"Would you prefer water?" Hannibal asked with no sign of a guilty conscience.

"I don't mind getting a bit tipsy, but will you?" Will asked back. "My manners aren't as refined as yours when I'm sober. If you get me drunk I might be downright rude."

"I believe I could ignore any rudeness on your part, Will," Hannibal said smiling and Will smiled back. It was a nice sentiment and in a few days Will would know if Hannibal meant it. His Hannibal had always forgiven his rudeness and Will had been plenty rude when they first met as patient and psychiatrist. Only betrayal had provoked Hannibal into hurting him.

Will was pleasantly drunk when Hannibal lead him upstairs after dinner and dessert and another whiskey while Hannibal tidied up the kitchen. He was holding onto Hannibal who had drunk wine too but was annoyingly sober. Will wondered if he should be worried about his state and Hannibal's intentions but he just wanted to forget the trouble they were in and enjoy their time together for a while. He was reasonably sure Hannibal's intentions were not murderous.

When they arrived in the bedroom Will followed Hannibal into the bathroom which garnered him a raised eyebrow.

“Are we already at the point in our relationship where we share the bathroom at the same time?” Hannibal asked curiously.

Will leaned against the doorway.

“You got me drunk,” Will said and heard the slowness of his own words. “I want to watch you take off your suit.”

Hannibal seemed to consider Will’s request before he nodded once, slowly, and then methodically took off his suit. Will let his eyes roam over Hannibal’s form. He was lean and muscled but there was also a slight softness in the middle which Will had felt in their previous sexual contacts.

“Are you satisfied?” Hannibal asked as he stood naked, and without any shame, in front of Will.

Will shook his head and stepped closer to Hannibal. He placed his hands on Hannibal’s chest.

Take off your other suit, Will thought but didn’t say. It wasn’t the time to share that insight yet.

“Take off mine?” he asked instead and he smiled when Hannibal didn’t hesitate to comply. Strong and sure hands moved over and under his clothes, opening buttons. Will closed his eyes and let himself be handled. The stress he had felt about all the plotting and planning went away. He was in Hannibal’s hands and for the moment he didn’t have to decide anything. He could just let himself go.

Piece by piece his clothes were taken off until he stood naked beside Hannibal and still Hannibal kept touching him with broad strokes. Will kept still, his eyes closed. The touches were nice, possessive and sensual but he didn’t get hard from it. Will opened his eyes and fixed on Hannibal’s.

“I think you got me too drunk to get hard,” he said.

Hannibal leaned in and kissed him gently.

“You reacted very favorably to being penetrated,” he said when the kiss ended. “May I try to bring you to orgasm without being erect.”

Will huffed at the suggestion. He was pretty sure that Hannibal had planned this outcome but it sounded nice, letting himself go and being at Hannibal’s mercy for a while. He didn’t lean away from Hannibal as he put his arms around Will’s waist and pulled him closer.

“You could have just asked instead of getting me drunk,” he said and slowly rubbed against Hannibal. He added: “But it is more thrilling when I let you manipulate me.”

“You knew that I intended to make you drunk,” Hannibal explained with a smile. “And still you went along.”

“I expect to be well compensated,” Will said.

Hannibal didn’t answer him with words but he took Will’s hand and lead him into the bedroom and to the bed. He pushed Will onto it and he laughed at the move as Hannibal arranged his limbs.

“Are you enjoying letting me manhandle you?” Hannibal asked, interested.

“Yes,” Will said. He felt sleepy and turned on at the same time. It was an alluring feeling and as Hannibal climbed onto the bed and sat down beside him, Will closed his eyes, expecting touch. He heard the stream in the distance.

“Will!”, Hannibal said and Will opened his eyes at the tone.

“Stay with me,” Hannibal said. Will nodded and suppressed a yawn. Hannibal would deserve it to have Will fall asleep on him but he had been promised sex and he craved the closeness it would bring more than sleep.

Hannibal arranged Will on his stomach with his arms over his head and his legs spread out. A cushion was pushed under his stomach and Will could imagine exactly how he looked. He felt himself blush and he was happy he could hide his face in the bed and under his arms.

“Are you embarrassed?” Hannibal asked curiously and Will took a shaky breath.

“It feels like I should be,” Will answered.

“Don’t be,” Hannibal said. “You look very beautiful laid out for me.”

Will didn’t answer verbally but nodded into the sheets, trying to feel less exposed. He heard Hannibal open a bottle and something being poured. He expected lube but a moment later warm oil was massaged into his back by Hannibal’s hands. Will groaned as Hannibal started to seriously work on his muscles.

“We will mess up your bed and I will fall asleep,” he protested under satisfied moans.

“I’m very willing to sacrifice some bed sheets if it allows you to relax,” Hannibal answered.

For whatever you have planned, Will thought but didn’t say. The massage was very nice. Hannibal knew what he was doing and soon Will started to go limp and relaxed. Will didn’t remember when he fell asleep, but he knew being penetrated woke him up from the slumber he had succumbed to. Hannibal must have prepared him as he was dozing. He felt no pain, just fullness and warmth and the weight and pressure of Hannibal over him. Hannibal leaned forward and Will felt his chest hair on his back before warm breath touched his ear.

“So trusting,” Hannibal said with a rough voice and enunciated his words with a slow thrust into Will. Groaning, Will bucked against him and tried to orientate himself. He was still in bed, his body was very relaxed, his ass was raised by pillows under his stomach and Hannibal was in him, moving slowly and hitting his prostate expertly. Arousal was burning in Will’s stomach.

“You like it,” he said to Hannibal in a strained voice. “You could have done anything to me and it turns you on.”

“Yes,” Hannibal said without shame and sped up his movements. Will gripped the sheets and closed his eyes again. His mind was telling him how they looked and it was beautiful. He wanted something to remember and arched his neck upwards.

“Bite me again?” he asked. He wanted to see Hannibal’s face but the position wasn’t optimal for that.

The stuttering in Hannibal’s movements made up for the lack of sight, Will decided.

“Where?” Hannibal asked, out of breath.

“Same place as before?” Will answered and sighed. They had discussed it before and he wanted it to scar, he realized. He wanted a scar from Hannibal to replace the ones that were gone.

“It’s not healed yet,” Hannibal told him but he sounded like he was considering it.

“I don’t mind if it scars, I want it to,” Will said and pressed back as Hannibal thrust into him. He still wasn’t really hard but the closeness made up for that. Hannibal’s movements sped up again and he nuzzled Will’s neck. Will couldn’t stop himself from making little needy moans and a moment later he didn’t care how he sounded when Hannibal opened his mouth and bit him. Will screamed as pain paired with his arousal and his muscles strained not to buck Hannibal off to avoid being hurt. A warm groan hit Will’s skin where Hannibal’s teeth were in his neck and he felt a shudder go through Hannibal’s body as his thrusts began to slow down. When his head stopped spinning, Will felt Hannibal let go of his neck and start to get off him. The pain from the bite lessened.

“Don’t,” Will begged and with an uncoordinated move he reached backwards and gripped Hannibal’s hair to pull him down again.

“I need to look after the wound,” Hannibal said. Will could feel his cock softening within him and he knew that Hannibal’s teeth were bloodied. If he looked back now, he would see the Ripper shine through the cracks. He didn’t turn.

“Just stay in me for a moment,” he said, knowing how needy he sounded. “Just a moment longer, please.”

Hannibal sighed and lay down on Will’s back again, carefully putting some of his weight on his arms so he wouldn’t crush Will.

“Thank you,” Will said and petted Hannibal’s hair. He could feel the product in it and that little detail helped him ground himself.

“It wasn’t like an orgasm,” he told Hannibal. “But it was pleasurable. The pain and the penetration.”

“Arousal and pain are very similar for the body,” Hannibal said, unsurprised. “Are you still tired?”

Will suppressed the urge to shake his head against the sheets. He didn’t want to aggravate the wound.

“No, not at the moment but I’m pretty sure I will crash soon,” he answered instead. “Did you like it? Having me at your mercy?”

“Very much,” Hannibal said lightly and kissed him beside the wound. “Will you let me care for you, now?”

Will didn’t want to but he let Hannibal get up. When Hannibal slipped out of him, Will felt empty and gave a displeased sigh. Hannibal chuckled and Will gave up on hiding his face and looked back. Warm amusement was painted all over Hannibal’s face and a rush of affection overcame Will.

Cocky bastard, Will thought and flipped around as Hannibal stood up. He watched him take off the condom and go to the bathroom. They would have to change the sheets but Will couldn’t be bothered to stand up. He wondered if Hannibal would consider it rude and decided that special circumstances applied. He had just been fucked into the mattress and bitten bloody. Letting himself be pampered afterwards was the price Hannibal had to pay for having him as he wanted. He heard water and some moments later Hannibal came back clothed in a bathrobe.

“I ran you a bath,” Hannibal said. Will thought about it for a moment.

“You will have to watch out so I don’t drown,” he said and held out his hands. With a smile, Hannibal stepped closer and helped him up. Will grimaced as he stood and felt the burn fully.

“Shall I carry you?” Hannibal asked, still smiling. Will huffed and remembered being carried out of Muskrat Farm, a hazy memory of coldness and the warm shelter of Hannibal’s arms.

“I can walk,” he said and let himself be led into the bathroom. The bath was lukewarm, probably a good idea as the bite on his neck was still bleeding and a hot bath would have aggravated it. The water smelled of herbs when Will leaned back into it.

“Will you be alright if I leave for a few minutes to change the sheets?” Hannibal asked. Will pondered the question and nodded.

“But if you hear a splash…,” he called after Hannibal when he turned.

“I shall come to your rescue,” Hannibal answered lightly.

Splash, Will thought and remembered the fall. He looked through the open door into the bedroom and felt the sudden need to just tell Hannibal everything and let him decide what to do next. It was such a compelling thought and he had to fight it down. Hannibal hadn’t shown himself to Will yet and Will hadn’t shown Hannibal who he was. As nice as the idea was, they still had a long way to go and Will’s knowledge of the future was the only advantage he had right now. *And I have to make up for bringing Jack to Hannibal’s doorstep first*, Will reminded himself.

Hannibal came back and Will pulled his legs up.

“Want to come in?” he asked, heavy-eyed, and to his delight Hannibal took off his bathrobe and joined him in the bathtub. He was unsurprised Hannibal climbed in behind him but didn’t mind much when Hannibal started to wash his hair. Hannibal very carefully made sure no foam went into the bite but it was still stinging and most likely bleeding from his body warming up.

“I’m not usually this pliant,” Will said drowsily as Hannibal rinsed his hair. Hannibal didn’t answer with words right away but hummed as he rinsed the last of the shampoo out of Will’s hair.

“But you do enjoy it,” he said and pulled Will back against himself. Will thought about it and finally nodded.

“It’s relaxing,” Will said. “I don’t have to think too much or adapt to you because you are already taking what you want. But don’t get used to it, I still have my own head.”

Hannibal kissed his temples and Will huffed amused.

“And you wouldn’t like me if I was like this the whole time.”

When they left the bathtub Will’s eyelids started to drop. Hannibal dried him with a towel, dressed the wound and, to Will’s amusement, applied a nearly scentless skin lotion all over Will’s body. He let it happen and watched Hannibal with a warm smile as he moisturized Will’s legs and feet.

“You are so weird,” he told him affectionately and petted Hannibal’s hair. Hannibal looked up, impassively.

“And that’s fine,” Will added smiling and leaned down to kiss him gently. He couldn’t stop himself from yawning as the kiss ended.

“Sorry,” he murmured against Hannibal’s lips.

“I have remade the bed,” Hannibal told him and stood up. “Please lie down and I will join you shortly.”

Will nodded hesitantly and got into bed. The sheets were cold and smooth when he laid down but he could feel them warming up from his body heat. Will closed his eyes, he felt Hannibal slip into bed at some point but was too knocked out to react. The last thing he felt before he fell into a deeper sleep were Hannibal’s arms pulling him closer.

Will woke at dawn to an empty bed. His first reaction was to bury himself under the blanket and sleep a bit more. But he had a narrow window for his plans and if Hannibal was making breakfast, as Will hoped he was, it would be a good opportunity for him to procure what he needed.

He couldn’t find his clothes but there was a neatly folded stack of new clothes in Will’s size. After last night and after his experiences with Hannibal in the old timeline, Will knew this shouldn’t feel invasive. It was nothing compared to getting his head cut open with the plan to eat his brain but, still Will felt a curious mix of amusement, chagrin and arousal. After brief consideration, Will concentrated on the arousal. Hannibal had chosen these clothes for him and it meant he would like to see him in them.

He put them on, feeling like he was doing a reverse striptease without the intended audience. But not having Hannibal watch him was good, it helped him to put on the underwear Hannibal had bought. When he was dressed, he went to the mirror and tried to see what Hannibal had seen. It was a suit of course, but Hannibal had spared him the tie and there was no paisley. Dark green trousers and jacket with a cream-colored shirt. It looked good and Will liked it, particularly knowing Hannibal had bought it for him. He took the jacket off again and checked for labels, there were none. Smiling, Will put the jacket back on. They had been made for him.

Will went silently downstairs and listened for noise. There was some coming from the kitchen to his relief and he was able to go to the cloakroom and get his cellphone, which he had left in his coat pocket. He also made a quick print of the house keys Hannibal had left beside the front door before they went to the kitchen. It was the first time he had done something suspicious around Hannibal and he hoped nothing would give him away. He concentrated on the feelings he had had when he got dressed upstairs. The arousal and the slight irritation he had felt were like a second suit around him when he entered the kitchen.

Hannibal was dressed in a suit too but the jacket was hanging over a chair. He was working at the stove and looked up when Will entered. The visible appreciation he showed fueled Will’s arousal.

“Good Morning, Hannibal,” Will greeted him.

“Good Morning, Will,” Hannibal answered him as he looked over him with satisfaction.

“You owe me for this,” Will told him and held himself straight as he walked to the other side

of the kitchen isle from Hannibal.

“I owe you?” Hannibal asked, interested.

“You wanted to see me in these clothes and I put them on for you,” Will explained. “You owe me.”

Hannibal watched him for a moment and then nodded in a small movement.

“And what is your price for my pleasure, Will?”

“I’m still thinking about it,” Will said. “I will let you know when I have decided.”

“I am looking forward to it,” Hannibal said with an amused smile.

“And I hope my own clothes will return to me?”

“After they’ve been cleaned,” Hannibal answered and Will nodded satisfied.

“Can I help with breakfast?” Will asked.

“Would you set the table?” Hannibal asked and Will nodded with a suppressed sigh.

Setting Hannibal’s table was not easy, Will decided, but his eidetic memory helped him enormously in setting everything in the right place. Just the decoration confounded him a little. It was a flower arrangement with little bird skulls in it and Will could only shake his head at the morbidity of the motif. After some consideration, he placed it a little away from where they would eat because he preferred to look at the food and not skulls.

When breakfast was served and they sat down in the dining room, Will could see Hannibal check over the setting and smirked at him.

“Don’t be so surprised,” he told him. “I might have no clue but I do have a good memory.”

“You haven’t seemed uncomfortable or out of your element so far,” Hannibal said and Will realized he had forgotten Hannibal didn’t know him from the time he had been less polished. He was a version of Will Graham Hannibal had formed and molded and table manners were one of the things Will had learned by adaptation.

“I’m good at pretending,” Will answered.

They ate in comfortable silence and after breakfast, as Will prepared to leave, he felt sad his time with Hannibal had temporarily come to an end.

“Can we meet when I have returned?” Hannibal asked. “I could visit you. I know you can’t leave your four-legged family alone for too many nights.”

Will nodded. “Yes, that would be good.”

He was nervous again and he didn’t want to say goodbye, knowing when they met again everything would be different. Hannibal seemed to pick up on Will’s mood and took Will’s face in his hands.

“Have you decided?” Hannibal asked, and a shudder went through Will.

“Decided?” he asked.

“What favor you will ask of me,” Hannibal reminded him and his eyes wandered to Will’s lips.

Will didn’t answer but leaned in for a kiss.

“Not yet,” Will said when they separated. His lips felt sore. “I will tell you when we meet again.”

“I look forward to it.”

Leaving was hard, but being dressed in clothes Hannibal had chosen for him, and still tasting Hannibal and his food on his lips, helped. Will made himself not think on the drive home. He just concentrated on the domesticity he had shared with Hannibal and tried to imagine a life like this. It was a nice fantasy but it also felt vague and distant.

The dogs were happy to see him when he came home and he spent the time until the weekend spoiling Larry and Marvin. The handover of Larry to Alana fit nicely into his plan to draw suspicion away from Hannibal. He would meet her shortly after handing Marvin over to his new owner. When he called her, he asked her if he could stay overnight. Alana, of course, made fun of him for wanting her to distract him from missing Hannibal. He suggested they have a pajama party, and though he had intended it sarcastically, Alana laughingly agreed. He hoped she didn’t really mean it.

The day before the sleepover he broke into Hannibal’s place with the key he had made from the print. Breaking into Hannibal’s house, he realized, was more frightening for him then committing a murder. He half expected Hannibal to be there when he arrived, and walking through the empty house was disconcerting. With Hannibal’s presence, it hadn’t felt like the place Abigail had died. Now though, he was reminded of the bloodbath in the kitchen with every step. He told himself to remember a living and breathing Abigail existed now and it helped, but he was still shaky as he entered the kitchen.

He started with the fridge and ended in the basement, which was luckily mostly empty. When he left, he had many pounds of human meat and Hannibal’s Rolodex with him and the house was as forensically clean as he could manage within the limited time he had had.

The next day he spent with the dogs and tried not to worry. Marvin and Larry deserved his full attention and he wanted to spend some time with them before giving them away. Even nervous and distracted by the mess he had made, it was hard to say goodbye. The following evening he left to hand over Marvin and take Larry to Alana. The meeting with Marvin's new owner was short and when Will left he felt guilty for the hurry he had been in. Fretting, he continued on with the other dogs to Alana's.

He remembered the threat of a pajama party from Alana when he was nearly there. Being Alana's friend with Hannibal as partner was certainly different to being the socially awkward and unstable Will Graham. He felt like he should be insulted by how much easier Alana could relate to him now, but he knew how miserable he had been before he met Hannibal.

To his relief, Alana wasn't in her pajamas when he arrived and they spoke mostly about the dogs; he could handle that. They settled Larry in as well as they could, with Winston and Buster being excited about visiting a strange place. Their early dinner was nice but nothing compared to Hannibal's menus. He didn't tell her, but he had a feeling Alana knew. He spiked her drink when she was taking the dogs out for a few minutes and afterward it was a simple matter of waiting until she got tired and called it a night. By nine o'clock she was fast asleep and didn't wake when he checked her breathing.

He didn't like leaving the dogs with an unconscious Alana but he had taken them out for a very long walk in the morning and they were asleep too. He changed into forensically clean clothes and left.

Bedelia's house was unfamiliar ground for Will. He knew the general layout from the time Alana had given him a copy of Hannibal's file before he left for Europe. Bedelia had an alarm system, which was a problem, but Will was reasonably sure that he could make her let him in, even at this late hour.

He ruffled his fingers lightly through his hair before he rang the doorbell. It took a while but finally the door opened and he saw half of Bedelia's face between the door frame and the door. She looked frightened, which was unexpected, but of course she hadn't been behind the veil with Hannibal yet.

"Doctor du Maurier?" he asked, pretending to be nervous about being there.

"Yes," she said and frowned slightly.

"My name is Will Graham," he said and wetted his lips. "I'm very sorry to disturb you at this hour but I'm worried… it's to do with Hannibal Lecter and I was hoping…"

Will looked down and hunched his shoulders up.

"I know you are not allowed … but certain events have happened and I am very… scared."

He looked up and to his satisfaction the door had opened a bit wider.

“May I come in?” he asked uncertainly. Bedelia hesitated but finally nodded and stepped aside. Will followed her into the house and turned to watch her close the door.

“Thank you,” he said and sprang forward, gripped her head and knocked her hard against the door. She fell unconscious to the floor.

While Will worked on the scene he needed to present, he imagined how Hannibal would have killed her with him to distract himself from feeling remorseful. Hannibal’s design would have been prettier than Will’s and there would have been more cannibalism; probably one of her limbs so that she could partake on the meal. Will would have been defensive of their new relationship and Hannibal would have enjoyed the jealousy and the bitchiness between him and Bedelia.
The present tableau was in a way better because Will was in charge, and worse because he knew Hannibal would be angry about the missed chance. He had influenced Bedelia for years and Will was wasting his work away. Hannibal would have to deal with it and Will would have to deal with Hannibal being angry. He hoped he would survive it. Hoped that Hannibal would see that he was protecting him.

She woke up after he had redressed her and placed her in one of her armchairs; groggily, she looked at him as he sat down in the other armchair.

“You most likely have a concussion,” he told her. “Do you understand what’s happening?”

She blinked slowly and tried to focus on him. Her breath sped up when she realized she was bound to her armchair.

“Do you remember who I am?” he asked to get her talking.

“Will…,” she took a rough breath, “Graham.”

He smiled a half smile.

“Yes,” he said. “Did Hannibal tell you about me? Don’t worry about confidentiality, he was telling you cleverly veiled half-truths anyway, and I already know most of his secrets.”

Her eyes moved quickly, he could see that she was considering her options and compared to other conversations he had with her, she was very slow. He wished he hadn’t given her a concussion.

“You are… in a relationship with him,” she said very slowly and still breathing hard.

“Yes,” Will said and felt suddenly childish as he realized he had wanted her to say that. He was still jealous of the other Bedelia who didn’t exist anymore. It was cruel and he normally wasn’t cruel, at least not in this way.

Will stood up and walked over to her. She stared at him with wide eyes and he took his

gloved hand and laid it gently over her mouth before he said with guilt rising in him: “I’m going to kill you.”

Her pupils widened, and she tried to scream but was muted by Will’s hand as she struggled against the bindings.

Fight or flight? Will wondered as he watched her trying to get free.

“I will make it as painless as possible,” he promised her, still watching her face closely. He felt regret that he had not killed her as soon as he walked into the house. Seeing her frightened was infectious. He could feel her wish to live, her helplessness and her anger. She was no dragon. She wasn’t even the Bedelia he had learned to hate after she had run away with Hannibal. She was much closer to the woman that had come to the BSHCI and told him she believed him. He had felt so much hope in that moment.

“It will be better than staying locked up in this house, Bedelia,” he told her and stroked through her hair. “Better than being afraid of your potential and being played with by Hannibal.”

Will watched her terrified face and felt a yearning for the kill he had shared with Hannibal. Killing Francis had been so much more than this would be. This would be a waste and Hannibal would be righteously angry with Will.

“I’m sorry,” Will told Bedelia and her panic rose to a new high. He closed her nose with his fingers and pressed his palm over her mouth. It wasn’t painless and it took long minutes for her movements to slow. Her eyes became unfocused and then she died.

“Goodbye Bedelia,” he whispered as he took his shaking hand off her face. He stared at her and felt empty, like something inside him had died with her. He thought of the presentation he had planned and suddenly it didn’t fit anymore. But he needed to honor her without abandoning his plan.

It took him two hours more than he had originally planned and he had to check and double check the forensic evidence he would leave behind. Contradictorily, now that it was done and everything was just about the representation he felt calmer than he had with his other kills, apart from Hobbs’s. The design was right, it was his and no matter how much Bedelia wasn’t the counterpart she had been in the future which didn’t exist anymore, she was still a better canvas than his previous kills. And framing her as the Chesapeake Ripper with the tableau he left her body in, was a delicious illusion. It was a shame Hannibal would never see it, but Will would tell him about it. When Hannibal stopped being angry.

He left, got rid of his clothes and sent a message to Freddy before he drove back to Alana’s. He was relieved to find her still asleep. It was very early in the morning, he didn’t want to go back to sleep. Instead he went for a shower and took the dogs out for a walk. He found a little coffee shop and bought Alana and himself pastry and overpriced coffee to go. He was nearly back at Alana’s house when his phone rang. Juggling the food and coffee Will dug his phone out of his jacket and smiled ruefully as he saw Hannibal’s number. He decided to ignore him

for the moment and let himself back in. Alana was standing in a night robe in the corridor and looked sleepy. The dogs went to her and greeted her enthusiastically.

"Hey," he greeted her. "I nicked your keys because I didn't want to wake you, but I brought breakfast as apology?"

She was petting the dogs and looked up to eye the bags.

"I like that shop; did you buy their little cherry pastries?" she asked and Will nodded. She took the bags and the coffee cups from him.

"I'll set the table," she told him and Will took off his jacket.

"I will be there in a moment. Hannibal just called and I want to call him back."

He followed her to the kitchen and he could feel her frowning when she asked: "That's a bit early for a call, isn't it?"

"Yes," Will answered. "I better find out why."

He put the bags on the counter and went to the living room. He checked tattlecrime.com before he called Hannibal back but Freddy hadn't been that quick, there was no news about Bedelia du Maurier's murder on the site, yet. He called Hannibal. It only rang once before Hannibal took the call.

"Will," Hannibal said. He sounded pleased.

"Hi," Will answered, smiling. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, my apologies for calling early," Hannibal answered.

"It's fine," Will said. In the back of his mind, he thought that the call came at a good time. It would give both of them a location if necessary. "I was just out with the dogs and I wouldn't have minded you waking me."

I miss you, he thought, but didn't say. *I killed Bedelia to protect you, but will you be mad with me?*

"Are you at Alana's as planned?" Hannibal asked.

"Yes," Will answered. "We will be having breakfast in a few minutes."

He suddenly wondered if Hannibal had eaten breakfast yet.

"Have you...," he started. "Um… did you eat the hotel breakfast?"

Will flushed when he heard how slightly horrified he sounded.

Hannibal laughed lightheartedly.

“I booked a room with a kitchenette,” Hannibal said and Will licked his lips in relief.

“Good,” he said. “That’s good. So, when will you be back again?”

“Tomorrow,” Hannibal answered. “And you are not to come over. You have an early lesson the day after and I cannot let you make such a long drive in the morning.”

“After a night with not much sleep, you mean,” Will said. He looked in the direction of the kitchen to check that Alana wasn’t listening in. He felt awkward enough without.

“Yes,” Hannibal confirmed calmly. He didn’t seem to mind Will’s attempt at flirting.

“Alright, alright,” Will said. “But let’s meet up soon after, yes?”

“I would very much like that, Will,” he answered him.

Will heard steps from the kitchen and looked over. Alana was looking into the room.

“Alana needs her coffee and is too polite to start breakfast without me,” he told Hannibal.

Hannibal laughed again.

“Then give her my regards and enjoy your breakfast,” he told Will.

“Will do, have a good day,” Will said. He wanted to add “I love you” but didn’t want to say it on the phone and with Alana listening in.

She teased him about it when they sat down in the kitchen and he felt defensive, which of course Alana recognized.

“I didn’t mean to push,” she said to apologize. “You seem very good together and I’m happy for you.”

“Thank you,” Will said after a moment of pondering what to say.

“Is it weird?” he then asked curiously. “To be friends with both of us, and us being together?”

She thought about it for a moment and drank her coffee. Will took a piece of pastry but didn’t bite into it.

“It was a bit weird at the beginning because Hannibal is normally more reserved and his open… admiration for you startled me.”

Will suppressed the snort that wanted to escape him. She hadn’t really seen Hannibal openly

admiring someone.

“He is very focused if he wants something,” Will offered instead. “It surprised you that he wanted me.”

Alana flushed and Will reflected on what he had said.

“Sorry,” he said and instead of an apology he continued with a suffering expression: “I think he really wants to have a go at my wardrobe.”

Alana laughed, distracted by his insight.

“Don’t let him, he will take it over,” she advised.

“I don’t plan to,” he promised.

A bit later he left with Buster and Winston. Leaving Larry behind was hard, but he felt like he had gotten better with giving his dogs away. It helped that it was Alana. He knew he could visit Larry when he wanted to.

He checked his phone in a parking lot a few minutes from Alana’s and found a new article on tattlecrime.com. There were no pictures this time; Will hadn’t taken any. He had wanted to but he couldn’t risk it. He would have to describe it to Hannibal and maybe get his hands on the file. Freddy hadn’t much to go on but she painted it as another kill of the Ripper’s admirer and had dug out the death of Bedelia’s patient. She offered some vague hints of maybe her being a killer as well, but didn’t go too deep. Afraid of another libel suit perhaps. Will felt she might also be bewildered by his changing M.O. With the muralist, he had given her a live murderer and now she had a victim, without any obvious kills and no pictures.

That night he slept restlessly, he woke up too early and was unable to go back to sleep. After dawn, he took the dogs for a long walk to exhaust both them and himself.

When he came back, Tattle Crime had a more extensive article about Bedelia online. It was mentioned that she had worked with Hannibal Lecter, a consultant with the FBI. Officially it was the first time Will found out about their connection. He could call Hannibal and prolong his charade for a few more hours, get a few more hours of pseudo safety and the warm feeling of having a partner until Hannibal returned home. Until he found out that his kitchen had been ransacked.

“I’m protecting us,” Will whispered to himself. He wouldn’t call, it was a needy impulse and he couldn’t afford to look weak, not with Hannibal’s reaction to Will’s trickery in the future that didn’t exist anymore. Whatever came next, however Hannibal reacted, at least Will could be more honest with Hannibal now. He could lift one of the veils between them.

He knew when the flight arrived and he checked the airport’s website when that time came. The plane was on time. Will counted the minutes until Hannibal would arrive at his house and when that time came he considered calling, but decided against it. He couldn’t show

weakness, he reminded himself. No matter how much he wanted to speed up the coming confrontation and for them to be together again.

Instead he went and took apart his gun to clean it. The familiar task helped him to settle his mind. He considered taking the gun to bed but decided against it. If Hannibal decided to kill him, the gun wouldn't stop him and Will wasn't sure he could use it against him anyway.

As he lay in bed, pondering the past and the future, Will wondered if his Hannibal had been this nervous when Will had been framed for murder. He had let Will see him and the not knowing how Will would react must have made him slightly nervous. At least a little bit, Will hoped.

He woke up from a dipping of his mattress and the cold nose of a dog pressing against his face.

Sleepily, Will opened his eyes and found Winston in his bed and Buster just jumping up. A shadow stood in the frame of the door. Hannibal had come and he hadn't sneaked in and killed Will in his sleep. Will found himself smiling even as he tensed up.

"Do you want to come to bed?" he asked.

"I considered taking your dogs," Hannibal said without emotion and stepped into the room. The weak light from the window lit up his face and showed the contours. Will gripped Winston's fur in a brief moment of fear.

"Wouldn't be taking my fishing gear a more appropriate reaction?" he made himself ask.

Hannibal froze and Will made himself let go of Winston and sat up in bed.

"My apologies," Will said feeling annoyed at Hannibal's reaction. "You are right, Bedelia would be more like a pet and not a tool; something like a goldfish."

Will decided that they should see each other eye to eye for this discussion and turned on the light on his night stand. Hannibal watched each of his moves sharply when Will turned back to him. He wasn't wearing his plastic suit, Will saw with relief.

"Jack was investigating you, I decided to take matters into my own hands," Will told him. Winston had laid down beside Will and Buster was stumbling up to Winston.

"I'm sorry if I hurt you by taking her from you but I'm not sorry that I took measures to protect you," Will continued while Hannibal watched him. Will wondered what he was thinking coming here. He probably didn't want to kill Will, he would have been more cautious if he planned to kill him.

To Will, Hannibal standing in his bedroom with his coat on and staring at him felt like an impulsive idea. Will felt his face go soft at the realization. He had lured the monster into his home and it wasn't sure if it wanted to attack or to lie down and sleep.

“How long have you known?” Hannibal asked. He sounded a bit intrigued to Will but he was still holding himself back and keeping his emotions inside.

“Before we met, when you drove Alana,” Will answered.

“How?”

Will sighed but didn’t look away.

“That’s the hard question,” he said. “I… saw you. I saw what you are and I saw what we could be and I wanted it. As I had been looking for you it was a treat to meet you.”

Hannibal leaned his head slightly to the side and Will kept his eyes on Hannibal’s. He didn’t trust him, Will realized. He needed to change that. But talking about time travel would sound crazy.

“I have a suggestion,” he said carefully and a racing heart. “You don’t trust me right now. I understand that, I have hidden things from you and I took someone you considered yours from you. You don’t know what I will do next and you don’t like the loss of control. Would it help if I surrendered my control and freedom to you until you feel more relaxed?”

Hannibal didn’t answer but stepped closer to the bed. He put his right hand in his coat pocket and Will’s heartbeat jumped as he remembered being gutted. He expected a knife and relaxed a little when he saw the zip ties. Will wetted his lips with his tongue and looked to the dogs.

“Can I send them downstairs?” he asked hesitantly and felt relieved when Hannibal nodded. He ordered Winston and Buster off his bed and told the dogs sternly to go back to their beds. He had to repeat himself twice with Winston, but they left the bedroom.

The zip ties were dropped on the bed and Hannibal stepped back.

“Tie your feet to the bed, one tie for each. Keep your feet about a meter apart,” Hannibal ordered. Will followed the orders. Afterwards Hannibal let him tie his left hand to the headboard. The position felt a bit like a preparation for some kinky sex but the zip ties cut into his skin and hurt too much for Will to find it sexy. It was a relief to feel Hannibal’s hands on his wrist but soon his right hand was also secured to the headboard with the ties and Will put his head on the pillow and tried to relax. The position wasn’t particularly comfortable, but it was manageable.

“What now?” he asked Hannibal who was watching him with dark eyes.

“Are you cold?” he asked, and Will frowned.

“A bit,” he answered and watched as Hannibal pulled his blanket over his feet. “Thank you.”

“Do you love me, Will?” Hannibal asked, and Will blinked.

“Yes,” he said and watched as Hannibal looked to the window. He seemed to be thinking and Will kept quiet. He had had a long time to think. It was only fair to give Hannibal time now.

Hannibal stood motionless for a long time, staring into the dark without showing emotion. When he looked back to Will he touched the dark red tie of his suit and loosened it until he could take if off. As Will watched he opened the knot and stepped towards the bed again.

“I will be silent if you want me to,” Will promised frowning. But Hannibal didn’t answer and held the tie to Will’s mouth. Will opened up for it and let himself be gagged. Hannibal held his face for a moment with both hands and watched him. Will tried to be as calm and trusting as he could. He looked Hannibal straight in the eyes. It was Hannibal who looked away first and Will blinked as he stepped away from the bed.

“Bedelia,” Hannibal said and bent slightly down to turn off the light. “Wasn’t a goldfish in a jar and I don’t like to be played.”

Hannibal left the now dark room and pulled the door closed. Will’s pulse raised and his breathing had sped up. He wasn’t sure what he had thought Hannibal would do but it wasn’t this. He had expected a discussion or violence. Hannibal leaving made him terrified. He tried to listen to what Hannibal was doing, but heard nothing. Will counted his breaths to calm himself while his imagination considered all possible outcomes and played the worst for him. Memories of the kitchen and Abigail bleeding out came and Will pressed his eyes shut. It didn’t help. His memory was too good and his fear too strong. He tried to empathize with Hannibal in this very moment, but as he was trying to focus, the noise of two gunshots sounded like thunder through the house.

The silence after was deafening. Will waited to hear barking. The dogs should be enraged about the noise. But he heard nothing and Will keened as he realized what it meant. His dogs were dead. Hannibal had killed his dogs. Will screamed through the tie in his mouth and reared up in bed against his bonds. As the zip ties cut into his flesh the sharp pain made him stop. He took a deep breath through his nose and made himself release it slowly. Adrenalin was rushing through his body and he wanted to run or to fight, but both weren’t possible thanks to the bonds.

Think! Will told himself. *What will Hannibal do next?*

Will was listening but he didn’t hear Hannibal on the stairs. He was leaving Will alone. This was punishment the same way killing Abigail had been. Will had misbehaved and this was the result. He didn’t see Will as an equal, Will realized. Not like the future Hannibal had seen him on top of the cliff. Will being a killer hadn’t been enough for Hannibal to accept him as his counterpart.
Will tried to empathize with Hannibal but his emotional turmoil made it difficult. His mind was going back to Buster and Winston, and Abigail on the kitchen floor, bleeding out.

He will take me away, Will thought. Like he had taken Abigail and Bedelia. And he would be

molded to whatever Hannibal wanted him to be. Will calmed a bit down. He could be with Hannibal like that. The drugs would help him bend for Hannibal. He could stop fighting and just be.

Will looked up to his shaking hands and the zip ties that held them. He was back in the kitchen, there was blood and pain and Hannibal spoke to him:

"You can make it all go away. Put your head back. Close your eyes. Wade into the quiet of the stream."

Will whimpered through the gag and he could feel tears running over his face. In his memory Abigail was lying on the kitchen floor and was bleeding out, like her father had bled out in the pristine snow.

Will turned his left thumb to the wood of the bed and pushed against it until it dislocated and he could slip it free in a haze of pain. He used his other fingers to pull out the gag. He was sweating and crying and nearly screamed the house down when he used his mouth to relocate this thumb. The pain felt unbearable but the memories of being gutted and surviving let him reach for his glasses on the nightstand with his throbbing hand. He pulled the earpieces from the arms of his glasses with his teeth and use the arms to push into the locking head of the zip ties to break open the tie on his other hand and his feet. Sitting free in bed was disconcerting. He didn't know what to do. Things had gone so wrong so fast. His thoughts were chaotic and he stumbled out of bed to the door. *I was already giving my dogs away for Hannibal*, he thought hurting mentally and physically as he opened the door.

The stairway was dark but there was dim light downstairs and as Will stood at the top Hannibal came into view at the bottom. He was a dark shadow surrounded by a halo of light. Will knew he needed to be sharp, he needed to concentrate but he felt completely out of control right now. Part of him wanted to turn and run and another wanted to go down the stairs to Hannibal, maybe to kill him or maybe to hide in his arms.

"Will," Hannibal said calmly and stepped on the stairs. Will went backwards involuntarily.

There was no weapon upstairs, he realized. All his knifes and his guns were downstairs. Nothing had made it upstairs when he started to use the bedroom. And Will decided he didn't want to be someone other than he was now.

"Just kill me," he told Hannibal with a desperate voice as Hannibal came upstairs step by step. Will walked backwards until he reached the window to the front porch roof. He looked at it and remembered his dogs standing there and looking out at him when he had sleepwalked. *Oh god, Winston and Buster are dead,* Will thought.

When he looked back up Hannibal had reached the first floor and stood there watching him. Will could barely see him in the dark.

"I can't be a replacement, can't survive in a cage," Will said and put his right hand on the glass of the window behind him. "Just kill me and be done with it."

Hannibal tilted his head as he answered: “I won’t kill you, Will.”

Will wanted to close his eyes and keen again but he didn’t dare to close his eyes. Instead he balled his hands to fists and crushed the right one through the window behind him with full force.

Glass shattered and cut into him, Will turned his head and gripped a piece. Out of the corner of his eyes he saw Hannibal move and he swung the glass in Hannibal’s direction as he turned.

It was a blur. Hannibal blocked his arm and grabbed him, but Will hit him with his foot and they fell together with the glass between them. It cut into Will’s thigh and he grunted and rolled away from Hannibal. Warmth spread with the blood from the wound and Will felt a familiar sluggishness. He laughed and tried to hold the wound but his arms wouldn’t follow his commands. Hannibal’s silhouette came up above him and Will felt pressure on his thigh.

“Keep still,” Hannibal ordered with a rough voice but he didn’t sound confident. Will wished the light was on so he could see Hannibal’s face. The warmth was spreading still around Will’s leg but his hands and arms were cold.

It always ended like this between them, with blood rushing out of his veins and burning on his skin. Will closed his eyes and from far away he heard Hannibal call his name.

“Will! Will!?”

~~The End~~

~ And this is where the story begins ~

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Will?" he heard Hannibal say again. "Will?"

Dying had felt peaceful this time. Hannibal had been with him and there hadn't been a great amount of pain. But he was in pain now. The pain of fever and Will's head felt like it was cracking open any moment. He tried to open his eyes but his body didn't react. It wasn't a feeling he was used to but it was also familiar.

"Will, you are having an episode. I want you to hand me your gun!" Hannibal said.

Will shook his head, confused and a shudder ran through him.

"Will?"

Hannibal's voice sounded like he was far away and Will felt himself fall. He expected to hit cold ocean water but it was a hard floor that he landed on. Will convulsed, a loud shot sounded. His hand hurt. He realized he had a gun in it and felt someone take it. He couldn't stop them and he couldn't open his eyes, his whole body was straining against something he couldn't identify.

Seizure, Will thought slowly as his body calmed down. He had been having a seizure and everything felt very familiar.

"He's had a seizure," he heard a male voice he felt he should know say. It reminded him of blood on snow at night. "But that doesn't seem to bother you…?"

"It seems to have been a mild seizure," Hannibal said. Will wanted to look at him but his body wouldn't react.

"Are you the man who claimed to be the Chesapeake Ripper?" Hannibal asked with honest curiosity in his voice. And Will remembered this moment now and he remembered who would speak next.

"Why do you say claimed?" Abel Gideon asked.

"Because you're not. You know you're not and you don't know much more about who you are beyond that."

Because Hannibal is the Ripper, Will thought confused. He had done this before but instead of lying on the ground he had been standing. He had remembered it later in the BSHCI after the encephalitis had been treated.

“A terrible thing to have your identity taken from you,” Hannibal continued and Will wanted to scream but his body didn’t let him. He could be dead for all he was able move right now, but the pain in his head meant he was alive and hurting.

“I’m taking it back one piece at a time. You should see the pieces I got out of my psychiatrist.”

Frederick, Will remembered. Burned and partially consumed, but he wasn’t yet.

No, that was wrong. He hadn’t met Frederick yet, or had he? He had travelled through time and nobody had remembered. He had seduced Hannibal and had died; bled out in his house after fighting with Hannibal.

“Alana Bloom was one of your psychiatrists, too. Is that right?” Hannibal asked.

“Yes. Dr. Bloom,” Gideon said slowly, thoughtfully.

But this had happened the first time. When Hannibal had been his psychiatrist and not his lover, when Will had been ill.

Encephalitis, Will remembered. He had had a seizure because of the encephalitis. He was sick again, was Hannibal’s patient again and he was in his dining room together with Abel Gideon who had just escaped from the BSHCI.

“I can tell you where to find her,” Hannibal offered to Gideon and Will felt tears escape his closed eyes. He knew how this would go and he didn’t want to. Why was this happening? He didn’t want to be here. He wanted to… to go home. But what was home? It had been his house and his dogs and then his life with Molly. And after killing the Red Dragon and the fall from the cliffs and travelling back in time it had been with the past’s Hannibal. But the Hannibal of the past had shot his dogs and Will had died, again.

Will didn’t understand what had happened. Had he travelled a little in his personal future? Or was all he remembered a hallucination of his mind still suffering from encephalitis?

Chapter End Notes

If you have reached this end I can now tell you that the story is **loosely** inspired by a novel called “Replay” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Replay_(Grimwood_novel)). It’s a novel about a man who is “replaying” his live repeatedly. Whenever he dies he gets transferred back in time but with every death the time frame he travels back gets shorter. It’s a bit of a dry read but I like the idea a lot. (It most likely inspired the movie “Groundhog Day”, btw.)

Note: Blanket permission for translations, podfic, fanfic in this timeline/universe, fanart, etc. Have fun, let me know if possible and link to the fic, please. Thank you!

:)

Works inspired by this one

Waking Up by LostBetweenBooks

[Podic] We Killed a Dragon Last Night by Rhast

[Podfic] We Killed a Dragon Last Night by DeliberateDisguises

[COVER] We Killed A Dragon Last Night by TFE

Means Of Influence by ParakeetProsciutto

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!